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A JOYOUS ADVENTURE

by

Baroness Orczy

Martin Leroy Charles Saint-Denys, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune, undertook to pay £5,000 "to whomsoever will deliver me from an incurable disease known as boredom", due to the recent peace with France. This advertisement was to be the start of a joyous adventure which completely banished all his *ennui*. It was to involve him in a Royalist mission into Napoleon's France, made the more dangerous by the Norman Royalist's order to kill him before he could carry out his hateful orders.

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A JOYOUS ADVENTURE



Baroness
Orczy

*The characters in this book are entirely imaginary
and have no relation to any living person*

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CHAPTER I

THE Château de la Villorée still stands to-day as it did in this memorable year 1800, and as it had done for several centuries before then. With its four square, crenellated towers, its massive front and iron gates, it dominates the whole of the valley of the Orne. At the foot of the wooded heights the river winds its turbulent way towards the English Channel; the valley here is very narrow, and the heights rise on either side of it, steep and densely wooded on the right, sloping more gently up on the left to the plateau on which the château stands. Its gardens and terraces and parkland had been beautiful once, sumptuous and magnificent in the days, now past, when the Marquis de Marillac de la Villorée was counted one of the greatest gentlemen in France, the friend of kings, the proud aristocrat born and bred in the notion that Almighty God had created French noblemen above the rest of mankind and only one small degree below His angels.

In the days before the Revolution put an end to all the privileges enjoyed by this sacrosanct caste M. le Marquis de la Villorée lived in his château and in his palace in Paris with the pomp and splendour of a royal court. He had servants and retainers, and an army of sycophants around him; when he drove along the roads of Normandy all heads were uncovered—even that of the parish priest—until his carriage had gone by.

Then came the Revolution, and with it the sudden shattering of every illusion of privilege or prerogative. The noble dukes and marquises were rudely awakened from their dream and made to understand that neither their fortunes nor their possessions were secured to them by divine ordinance, and that if they refused to bow their necks to the dictates of this new tyrannical democracy, their lives would pay the price of their arrogance. Noble heads, heads of King, Queen, princes, dukes and countless aristocrats, fell beneath the knife of the guillotine like golden ears beneath a labourer's scythe.

Warned by an anonymous friend of the imminence of arrest on a trumped-up charge of treason, M. le Marquis de Marillac de la Villorée on one evening seven years ago packed hastily together a few necessities, and at dead of night was luckily able to make the coast and there embark on an English ship which took

him safely across the Channel. Since then he had lived in exile partly in England, partly in Belgium. A few scattered bits of his once colossal fortune being invested in foreign countries, he was able to render a few minor financial services to his exiled King, and more than one small debt owing by the French royal family to tradespeople in England was paid by M. le Marquis de Marillac.

He had not seen his wife and children for over seven years. Madame la Marquise, with her daughter and two sons, had chosen to remain at La Villorée and never yielded to the temptation of joining her husband in exile. Strong-willed and almost insanely loyal to the monarchical cause in France, she was convinced that within a very little while the forces of law and of tradition would triumph over those of organised murder, outrage and anarchy, and she felt it her duty to remain on the spot among her own people, her husband's retainers, ready to share their poverty, as well as the many dangers which threatened them through their unswerving loyalty to the cause of the Bourbon kings. She knew well enough that by so doing she risked not only her own life but that of her children, but Mme. la Marquise could be counted more valorous than the Mother of the Gracchi, and certainly more fanatical, for she looked upon René and Alain and even Félise as instruments fashioned by God for the sole purpose of aiding the royal cause.

So she stayed on at La Villorée after most of her kindred and friends had shaken the dust of their country from their shoes. Strangely enough, the tigers of the Revolution passed her by. Once or twice she was molested, threatened even, but it never came to an arrest or the menace of the guillotine—probably because she did not care enough.

"If my death should help the cause of our King," she had said more than once, "how gladly would I die!"

And she meant every word she said.

Selfless, dignified, and solitary save for the companionship of her children, her life was spent in hoping, always hoping that God would tire one day of the wickedness of men and open their eyes to the dictates of His will, which was nothing else but the restoration of the Bourbon monarchy. She had seen the overthrow of the worst elements of the Revolution, and at the death of Robespierre and his murderous crowd her hopes rose to their giddiest heights, but five years had gone by since then, and the rightful King of France was still biding his time over in England. An abominable usurper named Napoleon Bonaparte, the bourgeois son of an obscure Corsican attorney, had now the pretension

to rule France, and with his arms, his police and his spies to suppress any attempts at fighting for God and the rightful King. He was the idol of the people, styled Chief Consul of the Republic, and had the impudence to try and correspond on terms of equality with the King of England.

Mme. de Marillac spent her days turning to God in her despair and sighing: "How long, O Lord? How long?"

But she did all she could to infuse patience in all those hot-heads in her own district who were for ever plotting to murder Bonaparte, to rise *en masse* against his tyranny, to march on Paris, to enter, in fact, in a hundred mad schemes for the overthrow of the new tyrant.

"The time is not yet," Madame would declare in her quiet, resolute voice. "How can a lot of ignorant and undisciplined peasants wage war against the greatest military genius of all times who has conquered Italy and brought the proud Austrians to their knees?"

"Our men are burning with enthusiasm," the leaders of the irregular bands of royalists would try to argue, "and enthusiasm is worth——"

"Nothing," Madame would break in in her own authoritative way, "without some money and sound leadership."

She didn't care if it was Georges Cadoudal himself to whom she said this—Cadoudal who had raised an army in Vendée and in Brittany in the King's cause. She had her own way of thinking and was always sure that she was right.

"If only we could induce the Duc de Berry to come over. He would put such confidence into the hearts of our men."

This was Jacques Cottereau's pet scheme, and Cottereau stood very high in Cadoudal's councils. He wished to induce the Duc de Berry—own nephew to the uncrowned King of France and heir to his throne—to leave the security of Hartwell and English hospitality and to take command of these irregular troops in Normandy and Brittany, which he, Cottereau, along with Cadoudal and Pichegru, was raising with a view to waging guerrilla warfare against Bonaparte.

"You will never induce Monseigneur to come over," Madame declared, "save at the head of disciplined troops. It is for this that M. le Marquis and all loyal adherents of our King are working at this moment. To precipitate events now would be madness."

Cottereau protested with great vehemence.

"Madness? Madness? In Heaven's name, why madness?"

"Because in Heaven's name," Madame replied coolly, "it is the

will of His Majesty himself that we should do nothing without his sanction. And you know quite well, my good Jacques, that His Majesty is all against dragging our poor ignorant countryfolk from their villages, and sending them back, starving, a year or two later, back to their miserable homes where in the meanwhile their wives and children would probably have perished from want. I am quoting you His Majesty's own words in his last letter to me. Men must eat, you know, Cottereau. How are you going to feed your army?"

"We'd soon find means," Cottereau declared sullenly.

"Oh, I know!" Madame retorted again; "by highway robbery, robbing mail-coaches, by murder and intimidation. Not that I object to killing and robbing Bonaparte's adherents, who are infamous traitors to their country and their King, any more than I object to shooting a mad dog, or putting my heel on an adder's head, but His Majesty dislikes those methods, and we must conform to his will."

"Will you change your mind, Madame," Cottereau argued, "if I induce Monseigneur to come over?"

"If I get my orders from His Majesty, or from Monseigneur the Duc de Berry, I will obey, of course," Madame responded coldly. "But you are talking nonsense, Cottereau. Monseigneur, thank God! is in England——"

Cottereau gave a short, derisive laugh.

"And do you really think me such a weakling, Madame, that I could not find the means of landing in England if I chose?"

"I think," Madame retorted coldly, though not quite so unkindly as before, "that you are capable of devising any mad scheme if you set your mind to it. All I can hope is that if you do succeed in landing in England, Monseigneur will be wise enough not to listen to you. I know His Majesty won't."

"We shall see," Cottereau murmured in the end.

After which Madame rose, intimating that the interview was at an end.

Jacques Cottereau took his leave. It were impossible to guess from his sullen, glowering face what were his thoughts as he strode down the palatial staircase of the Château de la Villorée.

At the foot of the stairs he was met by René de Marillac, Madame's elder son, a lad not more than eighteen. He had been present at a part of the interview between his mother and Jacques Cottereau. At a critical moment he had tiptoed out of the room, because he wanted to have a private word with this man. With glowing eyes he had drunk in every word that Cottereau had spoken, for René Vicomte de Marillac was only a boy, and his

dreary life in the old château irked him. He had all a boy's longing for excitement and adventure.

He waited down in the hall till Cottereau came downstairs and Madame la Marquise was safely out of the way. Then he sidled up to the man and held out his slender hand to him, looking straight into the glowering face with the sullen-looking eyes and the unkempt beard, and said in a voice quivering with emotion :

"Remember, Jacques, that I am ready to follow you anywhere when duty and our King call me. I am only a boy, but I can shoot straight——"

He wanted to say more, but sobs had risen to his throat—and, boy-like, he would have been ashamed of tears—so without waiting for a reply he turned abruptly and ran quickly up the stairs.

Cottereau watched him for a moment with a queer expression in his deep-sunken eyes; then he shrugged his broad shoulders and went his way.

CHAPTER II

THIS interview had occurred in May in the year 1800. A few months later half a dozen were gathered round a deal table in the low whitewashed room of the *Cabaret du Pélican*, a lonely house which stands at the extreme end of the village street of Soulanges. They were eating bread and cheese and drinking cider. The room gave on a side door of the *cabaret*. It was bare, save for the table, a rickety bench or two and an old-fashioned clock up on the wall. In the corner nearest the door a number of muskets, staves and scythes were propped up. On the table a couple of tallow candles guttered in their pewter sconces.

It was past ten o'clock of a squally evening in October. Outside the wind howled dismally; heavy storm-clouds swept across the sky and occasional gusts of rain beat against the window-panes.

From time to time for the past hour there had come a knock at the outside door. In answer to the challenge: "*Qui va là?*" from within, the reply had invariably been: "*Le Gros*"—the Fat One; whereupon the door creaked on its hinges and another man, clad like the others in the roughest of clothes, slipped into the room. In most cases the new-comer carried a gun or scythe, which he deposited in the corner with the others.

"It is for to-night, then?" he would then ask before joining his comrades at food and drink.

"Yes—to-night!" was the unvarying reply.

The hours sped by leaden-footed. The old-fashioned clock up on the rough whitewashed wall ticked away the minutes with exasperating solemnity.

Toward midnight some thirty men were assembled round the table. The jugs of cider were empty. Bread and cheese had vanished from the board.

"We may as well start," said one man, who appeared to be in authority over the others. He was a rough-looking fellow with a huge black beard that entirely hid the lower part of his face, and his dark tousled hair fell in masses over his brow. He wore a wide leather belt into which he had tucked a pair of pistols. "What arms have we?" he asked.

Two of the men counted over the guns and scythes.

"Thirty-eight," they said.

"How many guns?"

"Twenty-five."

"Take those," the black-bearded man commanded. "Leave the scythes. We'll pick up guns in plenty. Remember, now—this is life and death for us all! Guns we must have and men, or we are doomed—the lot of us. Hey, la mère Gaillard!" he went on, and rapped with his fist on the table.

The door of an inner room was pushed open and a stout, slatternly-looking woman thrust her head in.

"*Eh bien, eh bien?* Was it thou calling, Cottereau? What is it now?"

"More cider," Cottereau commanded, "and quickly! We are going."

The woman disappeared, muttering something about time, bed and midnight. A moment or two later she returned, carrying two large jugs, which she set on the table.

"That's the last," she said curtly. "We've no more."

The men filled their mugs and they and the woman together drank to the success of the expedition.

Cottereau then gave the order: "*En avant!*"

Twenty-five men armed themselves with guns or muskets; four others, after fingering the scythes with some hesitation, finally decided to leave them as their leader had commanded and thrust their hands in their pockets. They all made for the door—all, that is, except one man, who sat silent and skulking on the rickety bench.

"It's nothing but madness," he murmured sullenly. "I'm not going."

The others paused and turned to look at the speaker. They

gazed on him with a kind of dull astonishment, their eyes somewhat blurred through the potency of Mother Gaillard's home-brewed cider. Cottereau merely shrugged.

"Come, Gilbert—don't be a fool!" he said curtly, and himself made for the door.

But Gilbert did not move. The woman, busily collecting débris of food off the table, muttered with a sneer:

"Drink and eat—drink and eat! That's all some of them are good for! And they know just enough to turn spy and traitor. Thou, too, art a fool, Cottereau . . . !"

"That's enough, Mère Gaillard," Cottereau broke in roughly. "We are not afraid of traitors. We'll march in a close column, and if one or other plays the traitor or the coward——"

He broke off abruptly, closing his lips beneath his scrubby beard with a snap. With a significant gesture he half drew one of the pistols out of his belt. Nothing more was said. One of the men had pulled upon the door; gusts of wind blew into the room. For the moment the rain had ceased and a fitful moon peered at intervals through the storm-clouds that still swept across the sky. One by one the men, silent and furtive, straggled out, those who carried a gun taking the lead. The others followed until Cottereau, the woman and Gilbert were left alone in the room. For a moment or two Gilbert kept up his attitude of obstinacy. He even tried to throw a defiant glance at his comrade. But the latter still had his hand on the pistol and, as if in answer to the other's defiance, he once more drew the murderous weapon partly out of his belt.

"You had best follow the others, Gilbert," he said quietly.

Gilbert, without another word, slunk out of the door. The woman watched him with a sneer on her face and a contemptuous shrug.

Cottereau then followed, after which the woman bolted the door, picked up the pewter candlesticks and went within, leaving the room in darkness.

CHAPTER III

OUTSIDE the small band started on its way.

"Where do we go first?" one of the men had asked as soon as Cottereau had joined them.

"To Glatigny," he replied. "There are three men there and they have a good many guns."

The road was soggy from the recent rain and a head wind made

going still more difficult. But the men—most of them, at any rate—appeared strong and resolute. Those who carried guns had formed fours, taking others, such as Gilbert and one or two who did not appear over-enthusiastic, between them.

The farm of Glatigny was only distant a few hundred *mètres*. The band trudged across the muddy road, then over a ploughed field, and came to a halt in front of a low irregular building flanked by a square tower, under the roof of which pigeons were roosting.

Two of the men knocked loudly against the door with the butt-end of their muskets. After a time the shutters of one of the windows above were thrown open and a man thrust his head out of the window.

"*Qui va là?*" he called.

"*Le Gros*," one of the men replied, and Cottereau added peremptorily: "Don't keep us waiting! We have still far to go."

After which they all waited down in the lane, while inside the house awakened activity showed itself by dim lights appearing here and there at the windows, by quick steps scurrying up and down stairs, by calls and oaths and admonitions.

"Eh, Joseph! Get the guns while I find my boots."

"Lazy lout to have fallen asleep! 'Twas thy turn to watch."

"No harm done! Everything is ready."

There were also intermittent cries from a woman:

"*Nom de nom de Dieu!* What an affair! Don't go, my man. It is madness!"

Cottereau and the men below waxed impatient.

"We shall never get on if we have to wait like this everywhere."

"Here we are! here we are!" came with an excited shout as the front door was thrust open and three men appeared on the threshold—an elderly man and two younger ones, obviously father and sons. Each of them had a musket slung over his shoulder and carried another in his hand; and behind them a woman with tousled hair about her head, kirtle and shift awry, obviously just out of bed, held a candle aloft with one hand and with the other mopped her streaming eyes.

"*Mon Dieu! mon Dieu!* What madness!" she lamented.

Cottereau gave a cry of satisfaction at sight of the guns.

"A splendid beginning!" he declared. "A good augury!"

The farmer and his two sons fell in with the others, and without further heed to the wailing woman the little party set out once more on its way. From house to house they went, from farm to

cottage or to château. The proceedings were always the same: a halt, a challenge, a demand for men and guns. This was Cottereau's scheme, to fight Bonaparte, the Italian usurper, who drove their priests away from their parishes and forced men to leave their villages and join his army, drill, march, obey orders, all of which was hateful to the independent Normandy peasant, yeoman, farmer, *seigneur*, or whatever he might be.

To-night was the night when the whole of Normandy would rise and take up arms against the usurper and restore King Louis XVIII by the Grace of God to the throne of France.

Fight? They were only too ready to fight. They had always hated the Revolution, which had deprived them of their *curé* and sent their *seigneur* to exile or to death. They were ready to fight—most of them, that is—though there were a few waverers, like Gilbert—*cowards* Cottereau called them, and had his own short way with them.

Thus, at Plancy, where lived Farmer Chatel and his three sons, when the men pounded against the massive oaken door of the substantial farm-house there was no answer for a long time. It was only when Cottereau gave the order in a loud voice to break the door open that a woman's head appeared at one of the windows on the floor above.

"What do you want?" she called.

"It is for to-night," one man shouted in reply. "Chatel has had the word. Where is he?"

"Sick," the woman replied curtly, "in bed."

The men jeered.

"And Paul?" they shouted. "And Georges? And Henri? Are they sick, too?"

"They have work to do in the fields to-morrow. They cannot come."

With that she pulled the shutters to with a bang, but not before Cottereau had called out in his stentorian voice: "Break open the door, comrades!"

With great gusto and lusty shouts the men hammered on the door. After a time it was opened from within and a young man appeared holding a lighted candle in his hand. His hair, all rough about his head, his flushed face, his bare feet, showed that he had only just tumbled out of bed. He looked wide-eyed and scared as he peered into the night.

"Now then, Paul," Cottereau commanded, "do not keep us waiting. Tell thy brothers to hurry, and pull thy father out of bed. Where are the guns?"

"My father——" Paul commenced, stammering.

"We'll see about him," Cottereau broke in curtly. "Get thy coat and thy brothers and bring us the guns."

Paul hesitated a moment or two longer. By a strange freak the flickering light of the tallow candle glinted on the brass-studded butt-end of Cottereau's pistols and on Cottereau's hand, which rested upon them. Without another word Paul turned on his heel and went up the creaking stairs.

"Where are the guns?" one or two men shouted after him.

As Paul made no reply, they invaded the house, some going in one direction, some in another. Cottereau followed the boy up the stairs. He overtook him on the landing and seized him roughly by the arm.

"No nonsense, Paul, remember!" he said in a rough hoarse whisper. "This is a matter of life and death to us all. The allied armies are marching on Paris and the King of France by the Grace of God looks to us just as much as to Prussian or English soldiers to set him back on his throne. To-night throughout Normandy, in every city, village and hamlet, men are rallying, arming ready to fight. For Bonaparte's police have got wind of this rising; they are well armed and well trained—far better than we are—and it is only by superior numbers and steadfast loyalty that we can hope to cope with them. Anyway, we have gone too far now to retreat. We are not going to play the coward and let our comrades of Caen and Falaise, of Evreux and Coutances, call us traitors. Those who are not with us are against us. And those who are against us are traitors whom I will shoot with my own hand like dogs."

Paul Chatel had listened in silence to this long peroration delivered in short, crisp sentences, each one of which seemed to strike a warning blow against his attempts at defiance. Cottereau was a fanatic, and with such a fanatic armed and ruthless there was no use in arguing, still less in resistance. Paul nearly lost his balance when the grip on his arm suddenly relaxed.

"Now go and fetch thy brothers," Cottereau concluded curtly. "I'll deal with thy father myself. Where does he lie?"

Paul, without a word, pointed to a door at the farther end of a narrow passage. He watched with very obvious apprehension Cottereau's big, ungainly figure stalk across the landing, then roughly kick open the door which had been pointed out to him and disappear within the room. He heard his mother's outcry, his father's vigorous oaths, and after that nothing more.

What happened in that room the three brothers Chatel never

knew. Presumably, Cottereau used the same arguments which had already got the better of Paul's resistance. Certain it is that ten minutes later Farmer Chatel and his three sons, each of them armed with a gun, formed part of the recruiting band, now swelled to considerably over a hundred. Most of the men had come willingly; others had yielded to the threats of the irascible Cottereau, who was just as ready to murder waverers in cold blood as he was to shed his own in King Louis's cause.

And the band marched on through the night to the many villages that lie dotted along the valley of the Orne. Glatigny and Donnay, Meslay and Plancy, Le Quesnay and Aubignay, and many more did they visit that night; and every time, in cottage or farm, they left the women lamenting—a sister in tears, a mother or wife protesting at the madness of it all.

The women wept because they knew. Somehow, women always seem to know when their menfolk engage in a forlorn hope.

But Cottereau and the enthusiasts were exultant.

"Three hundred," they declared, "three hundred from our small district to fight for King Louis! We'll not stop till there are five hundred of us to join our comrades at Caen. And then let Bonaparte and his army look to themselves!"

CHAPTER IV

THERE was still the château to visit. Its *seigneur*, the Marquis de Marillac de la Villorée, had been abroad since the dark days of the Revolution when he joined the allied armies which were fighting in the cause of King Louis. But his son René was now a lad of eighteen, quite capable of handling a gun, and the prestige of his name and presence would be valuable to Cottereau and his band. It was known all over Normandy that the de Marillacs were ardently loyal to the King: they had been bitter opponents of the Revolution while it lasted, and almost more bitter still of the usurper Napoleon Bonaparte. Many of Madame la Marquise's kith and kin had perished on the guillotine during the Reign of Terror; her younger boy Alain was born during the dark year when Louis XVI and the unfortunate Marie Antoinette fell victims to the murder-lust of the Terrorists. The men, therefore, did not doubt for a moment that René de Marillac would give his enthusiastic support to this expedition which was destined to restore King Louis XVIII on the throne of his forbears. It was only Cottereau who, remembering many heated arguments with the

domineering Marquise, was a little doubtful of the issue of his present high-handed enterprise; but he said nothing about that to the men. They had given a loud cheer when the château came in sight. There it stood, as it had done for centuries, on the wooded heights, towering above the surrounding landscape.

It was early dawn when Cottereau and his band came to a halt in front of the gates and demanded admittance. They tugged at the bell-chain, and the bell gave a loud clang; but no one came. It was only when Cottereau gave the heavy ironwork a vicious kick that it was discovered that the gate was not locked. It swung open on its rusty hinges, and the men hustled one another through. Cottereau led them up the terraced gardens toward the house, which was closely shuttered.

Neither in the gardens nor the château were there any signs of life. Neglect and decay were apparent everywhere. But Cottereau was not the man to pay heed to any of these things. He knew quite well in what a state of penury the proud Marquise and her children had lived for the past few years. But he was not the man to waste sympathy on such trifling matters as a lack of luxury. He himself had given up everything he possessed in the world for the cause which he had at heart. Jacques Cottereau had been a rich man once, a man of good family, belonging to the old landed nobility, and of high consideration in the province. He had sold his land bit by bit, his farms, his house. Homeless, he had taken to the road and the woods, sleeping in huts or in the shelter of a haystack, ill-clothed, unwashed, unkempt and more often hungry than satisfied. But every time he tightened his belt in order to still the pangs of hunger, he would murmur sullenly in his beard: "The time will come when we shall eat our fill and our enemies will starve."

By force of example he infused courage and power in the men, taught them ruthlessness and utter disregard of self. He was their acknowledged leader, but he shared every danger and every hardship equally with them. Because of this they respected and obeyed him. They feared him, too, but did not love him. At his word they would face death without a murmur, but did it for the King, not for Jacques Cottereau. And he knew that he ruled by fear, but he didn't care. Like Robespierre and his gang his dictum was: "Terror is the order of the day!"

Consumed by an overwhelming ambition he nursed the thought that his name would go down to posterity as another Richelieu, as "Cottereau the King Maker."

And now that he had entered the precincts of the stately château,

he trod the garden paths and mounted the terrace steps with the firm tread of a leader of men. He felt that his mission had reached the culmination of its importance. The young Vicomte de Marillac was not only to be pressed into this irregular army but he was to be its nominal leader, in spite of his youth, but with Cottereau as the real head and moving spirit, his aide-de-camp and adviser.

Having reached the topmost terrace the men once more came to a halt. They were now at the foot of the perron which led up by a double flight of marble steps to a delicately wrought and once-gilded iron grille. Cottereau called to half a dozen of his most favoured stalwarts and the men followed him up the steps. They tried the grille; it was locked. They banged against it and demanded admittance. Through the delicate ironwork they could just see the vast empty hall with its exquisite marble columns and the few bits of furniture, no doubt priceless, covered with dust sheets, over which the slowly creeping dawn shed its grey mysterious light. After a few moments of banging and shouting, timid shuffling footsteps were heard to approach, and after a moment or two an old man in shirt and faded cloth breeches, his bare feet thrust into shabby buckled shoes, came across the hall.

"Who are you, and what do you want?" he asked in a quaking, timorous voice. No doubt this shouting and this banging reminded him of those awful days of the Terror when soldiers of the Republic would demand admittance in the early dawn in the châteaux around, and when such visits meant domiciliary search in the château, arrest sometimes and often death.

"You know quite well who we are and what we want. Your master has had word," Cottereau said in his usual dictatorial tone.

"Monsieur le Marquis is abroad——" the old man began.

"We know that," Cottereau retorted, "but Monsieur le Vicomte is here."

"A child! Madame la Marquise would never permit . . ."

"It is not for Madame la Marquise to permit or not to permit. We want Monsieur René. Tell him to come down. But first of all," Cottereau added roughly, "open these gates or we will break them down."

"You wouldn't dare! . . ." the old man protested. "Madame la Marquise . . ."

"At it, comrades!" was Cottereau's curt retort.

Up went the muskets, and the first vigorous hammering shook the delicate grille in its hinges.

"Unlock the gates, Matthieu. Let us hear what these intruders have to say."

The voice, loud and commanding, was that of a woman. It had risen above the din of the muskets striking against the ironwork. At once the hammering ceased. Matthieu unlocked the gate. It swung open, and the men, somewhat abashed, stepped into the hall. The old respect for their *seigneur*, innate in every peasant of Normandy and Brittany, caused those who wore hats to doff them and the others to touch their forelock at sight of Madame la Marquise. Most of them knew her, of course, by sight, though many years had gone by since they had worked on Monsieur le Marquis's estate. Since then sorrow and anxiety, the perpetual fight against gnawing poverty that must at all costs be kept a secret, had blanched Louise de Marillac's hair and graven deep furrows in her cheeks. She had been beautiful once, her figure had always been commanding and she still held her head high. She was still the *grande dame* accustomed to receive homage from her subordinates, and even the irascible Cottereau appeared less arrogant, less sure of himself, as he met Madame la Marquise's haughty stare.

"Now then, Jacques Cottereau," she commanded, "what's all this? How dare you present yourself before me at this hour and demand admittance? Have you taken leave of your senses? And who are all these men?"

Louise de Marillac had rasped out these questions one after another. Her cold grey eyes, hard as steel—they had been soft once—swept over Cottereau and his stalwarts with such a glance of scorn that it made the stoutest of them wear suddenly a hang-dog-look.

But Cottereau was not the man to allow a sense of intimidation to get the better of him. He was the first to throw off the spell which the presence of Madame la Marquise seemed to have cast over them all. He gave his wide shoulders a shrug and said quite deferentially but firmly:

"You know quite well, Madame la Marquise, why we have come. You have had word from Le Gros. He—we all—expect Monsieur le Vicomte to join us. We want him to lead these men to fight in the King's cause."

"Monsieur le Vicomte is too young," Madame rejoined curtly. "At eighteen years of age a boy cannot be a leader of men."

"Am I not there to help and advise him?" Cottereau retorted. "And you yourself, Madame, would not wish a de Marillac to be cuddled up at home when all the men in the district are ready to fight for their King?"

"I am the best judge," Madame said haughtily, "as to what a

de Marillac should or should not do. Monsieur le Marquis is fighting for his King. The enterprise which you have in view will do no good to His Majesty's cause. I have told you that once before, Jacques Cottereau. It will discredit it in the eyes of the world and it will ruin the hopes of his loyal subjects ever to see him on the throne of France."

"Madame la Marquise . . ." Cottereau protested.

But Louise de Marillac broke in with stern authority: "I have spoken, Cottereau, and that is my last word. You are a fool indeed to imagine that a de Marillac would join a horde of undisciplined vagabonds who think to serve the King by committing every outrage that brings disgrace upon our province. Go back to your homes, all of you, and wait in patience until such time as your betters are ready to raise an army that can hold its own against Napoleon Bonaparte and the finest disciplined troops in the world. Then you can begin to talk of loyalty and of fighting for your King."

When first Madame la Marquise began to speak the men had listened in sullen silence. But when the words "outrage" and "undisciplined vagabonds" struck their ears, they grew all the more resentful, as the truth of what she said even they themselves could not deny. Their resentment gave itself vent in murmurs that grew louder and louder while Madame spoke.

"Where is Monsieur le Vicomte?" they demanded.

"To hell with all these arguments!"

"Where is the boy hiding?"

"Sneaking like a coward!"

"Afraid to fight? He—a Marillac!"

"I am for searching the house and dragging the whelp out of his lair."

Madame disdained both the murmurs and the threats. Having said her say, she turned her back on the men and prepared to sail majestically out of their sight, when a young voice rose suddenly from the top of the stairs at the far end of the hall.

"No one need search for me. I am no coward. I'm not afraid to fight."

René de Marillac had come running helter-skelter downstairs: a pretty boy, just eighteen, with fair curly hair, a delicate skin and large deep-blue eyes; his cheeks were aflame with unrepressed excitement. He was greeted with a lusty cheer.

"That's brave, René," Cottereau cried at the top of his sonorous voice. "I knew you would never play the coward. We've come to fetch you. You know why. Are you ready?"

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"Yes, yes! I am ready. . . . That is . . . I . . ."

The boy's enthusiasm had cooled down all of a sudden, as if a bucketful of cold water had been thrown over a fire, for he had reached the bottom of the stairs and there encountered Madame la Marquise, who was slowly going up. Quietly but very firmly she took him by the hand, and all she said was :

"Come, René!"

Never in all his life had René de Marillac disobeyed his mother. He was a French boy to the core, born and bred in the worship of his parents, and above all of his mother, who to him, as to every Frenchman, is ever a being that is almost sacred. The boy hung his head, ashamed of the tears that had welled to his eyes.

"Let the boy alone, Madame la Marquise!" Cottereau cried aloud.

"Be a man, Monsieur René!" shouted one of the men.

Madame did not say a word. She had gathered her full skirt in one hand; she held René by the other and began mounting the stairs. She did not drag the boy; he just came because mother had commanded, and never in his life had he disobeyed.

"Speak up, Cottereau!" the men urged, "as thou didst to Chatel and the others."

"Make no difference. Traitors are traitors, whoever they are."

"Where is thy pistol, Cottereau?"

But Cottereau by this time needed no urging. His temper was up, his fanaticism roused.

"You have heard the men, Madame la Marquise!" he shouted hoarsely. "Traitors are traitors, whoever they are. The word has gone round. Who is not with us is against us. Traitors and cowards we shoot down like dogs."

But Louise de Marillac paid no heed to these threats. She had spoken her last word, and her contempt for these marauders was too great to allow further argument. She was slowly mounting the stairs holding René by the hand, and the boy followed, obedient and shamefaced.

The next moment a shot rang out which seemed to shake the marble pillars with its terrific sound. It was immediately followed by a heart-rending cry of agony.

Exactly what happened at that early hour in the hall of the château de la Villorée will for ever remain a mystery. Certain it is that one man—not Cottereau—had shouldered his musket and fired. He swore afterwards that he had only meant to discharge it in the air so as to frighten Madame la Marquise. But old Matthieu had seen him raise his gun and had thrown himself blindly against

him. The shot went off at the precise moment when Mademoiselle Félice de Marillac appeared upon the top landing, holding her youngest brother, little Monsieur Alain, by the hand. She had come running down from the upper floor, anxious to know what was happening.

The bullet glanced off one of the pillars and hit little Alain in the breast. He fell without a groan into his sister's arms. It was she who uttered the agonised cry, while Madame ran to her side, and René, overcome with excitement and terror, fell half swooning upon the landing.

To Cottereau's eternal shame, be it said that he tried to bluster, whilst the man who had fired the fatal shot threw down his musket and fled like one possessed.

The others followed, awed and silent. Cottereau was the last to turn away from the scene of this appalling tragedy. Madame la Marquise had gathered her last-born and best-loved child in her arms. Like an automaton she moved, looking neither to right nor left, her eyes lifeless, like those of a statue carved in stone.

Félice de Marillac was still on her knees; so she had sunk when little Alain fell.

She struggled to her feet. The swish of her skirts caused Cottereau to pause. He looked back at her, and his feet for the moment seemed rooted to the spot, for she stood there, beautiful and unearthly in the grey light of dawn, with hand outstretched and eyes fixed upon that slinking crowd.

And then she slowly spoke the words which were for ever after to ring in their ears :

"May the curse of God Almighty be upon you and upon your enterprise."

And thus ended this night of October, 1800, the prelude of that bitter and cruel guerrilla warfare which took Napoleon Bonaparte and his magnificent army ten years to subdue.

CHAPTER V

THE "Fisherman's Rest" still stood at the beginning of the nineteenth century as it had done in the days when the gallant Scarlet Pimpernel and his band of heroes made it the starting-place for their adventurous expeditions to Revolutionary France. It was still the popular resort of high-class travellers on their way to the continent of Europe, as well as that of fisherfolk, soldiers, sailors

and smugglers, and it was generally averred that more plots of every sort and kind were hatched at the "Fisherman's Rest" at Dover than in any political club in London.

Be that as it may, it is certain that the six men who were gathered in the coffee-room of the popular tavern on this late afternoon of March, 1802, had no wish either to be seen or overheard by the rest of Master Jellyband's customers. They had chosen one of the deep embrasures formed by the high seats around a trestle-table, and when they spoke they did so in whispers, even though the language which they used was the Normandy patois, which is hardly ever understood even by Frenchmen, save those who have spent years in the province. Of the six men there was one who sat apart from the others. He was short and rather stout, with the hooked nose and high, somewhat receding forehead of the Bourbons.

Though he was quite young—five and twenty at most—the others listened or spoke to him with the greatest deference: they addressed him as "Monseigneur."

The shades of evening were beginning to draw in, and a stiff up-Channel gale was blowing.

"The wind is favourable," one of the men remarked, a rough-looking fellow with shaggy black hair and beard. "The next three hours will see Monseigneur's foot once more on French soil."

Monseigneur gave a quick, impatient sigh. "I would I were sure of the wisdom of this step," he murmured partly to himself.

"I wish," the black-bearded man retorted, "I were as sure of salvation as I am of that."

Monseigneur made no reply; he gazed thoughtfully through the window which framed in a picture of the harbour, and the small pier, and with fishing and other craft gracefully balanced in the wind.

"Well!" Monseigneur said after a moment or two, "I suppose it is time we went."

He rose and strode out of the coffee-room, the others following. A few heads were turned to watch the foreigners go. Master Jellyband, vaguely suspecting his customer's exalted rank, hurried across the room to open the door for him, and help him on with his coat. But this the bearded man would not allow. He snatched the coat from the landlord's hands and helped Monseigneur on with it, and finally presented him with his hat and cane.

For a long time after that did Master Jellyband stand under the portico of the "Fisherman's Rest" watching the group of "Frenchies" as they strode down the road along the waterside up

to a small landing-stage to which a short flight of stone steps gave access. Here a boat was waiting in readiness. Monseigneur stepped into it, and three of his companions went with him. The black-bearded man and one other remained on the waterside, watching the tiny boat being rowed across to where a hoy lay at anchor. In the fast-fading light it was just possible to distinguish the boat as she came alongside the hoy, and to see Monseigneur and his three companions climb up her side.

Master Jellyband scratched his head thoughtfully before he finally turned back into the coffee-room of the tavern. There was something in the appearance of the man whom the others styled "Monseigneur" which revived certain vague memories in the worthy landlord's mind. But soon he thought no more about it. French gentlemen of exalted rank were not rare visitors at his popular inn these days.

Half an hour or so later the black-bearded man and his companions returned to the "Fisherman's Rest." They had stood on the waterside, in the gathering darkness, for as long as the tiniest speck of light indicated the progress of the hoy. When the evening mist finally wrapped her in its impenetrable veils, the two men turned away.

"A triumph for you, Cottereau," one of the men remarked, as together they strode along the waterside.

"It should not have needed quite so much persuasion," the other said with a sneer.

"I don't know. It is a big risk, mixing him up with our fellows. There is so much that these royal people never understand——"

The man paused a moment, then added thoughtfully: "I wonder what Mme. la Marquise will have to say about it?"

Cottereau shrugged his broad shoulders, and muttered an oath or two in his beard; but he made no further remark until he and his companion were once more in sight of the "Fisherman's Rest." Then he said curtly:

"There'll be no one in the coffee-room now. And I want to read you the draft of one or two of my plans. I flatter myself that they are well thought out."

The two men then turned into the inn; even as they did so, a figure which in the darkness appeared almost like a part of the building detached itself from the tavern wall and retreated, crouching, still farther back into the gloom.

It was half-past eight o'clock when Cottereau and his companion finally came out of the "Fisherman's Rest."

The evening now was very dark. There was no moon visible.

Heavy storm-laden clouds swept across the sky, driven by an eighty-miles-an-hour gale, and save for the small oil-lamp under the portico the approach to the inn was in complete darkness.

The men were forced to bend their heads to the wind, and they had some difficulty at first in breasting the gale. At the corner of the street they parted, and Cottereau walked alone up the sharp incline of the ill-paved street which would take him to his humble lodgings high up in the town.

This street, too, was very dark. Cottereau strode along in the middle of the road. Conscious of his own powerful physique he had no thought of his personal safety, but he was carrying papers—those precious plans of his of which he was so proud—the importance of which it were impossible to over-estimate.

He had stowed them in the inside pocket of his rough jacket, and as he stepped out up the hill he held his hand tightly over those precious documents.

Suddenly and without warning two figures sprang on him from out a dark side alley; a thick cloth was thrown over his head, blinding him and smothering his cries and his oaths, while his legs were seized by powerful arms, causing him to lose his balance.

He fell, tried to struggle and to kick; he beat about with his fists, until his arms, too, were pinioned and tied with a rope behind his back. Three or four more ruffians had apparently come to the assistance of his first assailants; soon he was rendered quite helpless, through a rope being wound round his legs. Thus gagged and trussed he was lifted off his feet and carried down the hill. Whither he knew not. For some distance, at any rate. Instinct soon told him that it was somewhere along the waterside. He could scarcely breathe underneath that heavy cloth, which at the last moment had been tightened round his mouth; all he could do was to grind his teeth in impotent rage.

Who his assailants were he could not guess. He would have suspected common highway robbery, except for the fact that "gentlemen of the road" would not give themselves the trouble to attack anyone as roughly clad and as obviously unendowed with wealth as he was.

It must, then, be a question of his papers—spies of those whose interest it was to keep him out of the way, or to discredit him before the royalist faction. Those plans of his which he had been fool enough to jot down on paper would certainly do that—plans of robbery and pillage, not to mention murder. And Cottereau ground his teeth again and again; it was only in thoughts that he could curse, and curse he did those who had succeeded in getting

the better of him. Chief among these he reckoned no less a person than the uncrowned King of France.

He must have lost consciousness after a time, for he never remembered afterwards at what moment his captors finally set him down, or what happened for some time afterwards. When he came to, it was with the pleasant feeling of being able to breathe again; the cloth had been removed from his face, and at the moment he was actually staring into the light of a constable's lanthorn, held just above his face. One or two quidnuncs had stood by, and were already busy helping to undo the cords that pinioned his arms and legs. Cottereau's first conscious act, as soon as he had struggled to his knees, was to feel for his papers. He swore between his teeth when he realised that he had been effectually robbed, not only of his precious plans, but of the little money he had left to enable him to follow Monseigneur to France.

Cottereau was not a man of patience, which the worthy Dover constable discovered within the next few minutes, for, even while the quidnuncs were expatiating on the ineptitude of the local constabulary in coping with footpads and other light-fingered gentry, and he in a heated argument did his best to uphold the dignity of his office, the man about whom the whole pother was about slipped incontinently away. While the dispute was at its hottest Jacques Cottereau started to run, and by the time the disputants had realised that he was no longer there he had already disappeared up a side turning, and no one could tell in which direction he had gone.

CHAPTER VI

ON the 27th March, 1802, London went mad with joy. It went mad because the peace treaty with France had been signed.

Like all the other treaties to which Bonaparte had affixed his name, it turned out in the end to be a mere armistice. Suspicion and enmity lurked in its every line. True that on the one hand Napoleon, who had suffered severe defeat in Egypt at the hands of the English, showed a distinct inclination in the direction of good-fellowship, and that on the other, the retirement of Pitt from the leadership of the House of Commons removed from office the most bitter enemy of Revolutionary France, nevertheless every thinking person on either side of the Channel knew that old rivalries and old jealousies were as alive as ever. Dormant for the

time being, they would blaze up again into open enmity at the slightest provocation.

And there was always the small party of stiff-necked Tories, royalists by tradition, who felt that England had no right to make peace with a low-born soldier of fortune who had usurped the throne of the Bourbon kings. But these were in the minority. On the whole the news was received both by the wise and the ignorant with complete satisfaction. England had been shut away from continental Europe for ten years. Except surreptitiously—such as the great league of the Scarlet Pimpernel in the days of the Terror—no English subject had set foot on French soil since the day when England, outraged at the murder of King Louis XVI, first declared war on the Revolutionary government. But now moved by curiosity, as well as the joy of adventure, English and French travellers of all ranks and both sexes flocked into one another's country, eager to witness the changes which had been wrought on either shore of the Channel by a bloody Revolution on the one side, and ten years of warfare and attrition on the other.

Above all did English men and women of note wish to see the ogre Napoleon. Statesmen, artists, scientists to whom the very name of the little man from Corsica had been synonymous with Satan, now thronged the magnificent courts at the Tuileries, and paid their respects to "the usurper" and his creole wife just as they had done little more than a decade ago to King Louis and beautiful Marie Antoinette.

Members of the great French *noblesse* who had lived in exile in England all these years hastened to take advantage of Bonaparte's amnesty to the *émigrés*. Relying on his promise that their estates would be restored to them, they hurried back to Paris, ready to pay their court to the newly risen star, just as if the crown of their murdered King had descended upon him by divine right.

"Other times, other customs," was Lord Saint-Denys's favourite dictum when his Tory friends talked with some bitterness of this strange attitude of mind.

"Imagine," His Grace of Flint declared with a shrug, "those French aristocrats, who gave themselves such airs over here, bowing and scraping before that Italian upstart."

"Not Italian, my dear fellow," Saint-Denys corrected sternly. "Corsican."

"What's the difference?"

And Saint-Denys then assured them all solemnly that he didn't know.

"What are you going to do about it, Saint-Denys?" another friend queried with equal seriousness.

"About what?"

"This begad peace?"

"Help to break it as soon as I can," was Saint-Denys's curt reply.

"It's an outrage," His Grace of Flint asserted hotly.

"No," Saint-Denys retorted. "It's worse than that. It's a bore. I'm afraid I shall have to pay some of my creditors now," he continued with a weary sigh.

They all sighed in response, for they fully agreed with Martin Saint-Denys. They had had ten years of a strenuous, adventurous life: some of them, under the leadership of the Scarlet Pimpernel, had faced death almost daily for over five years. They had all of them fought against Bonaparte the rest of the time.

There were plenty of pessimists who vowed that the peace would never last, and frankly these smart young men about town sincerely hoped that it would not. To them royalty was a sacrosanct state, and kings were kings by divine right, and though Bonaparte had not actually belonged to the Robespierre gang of murderers, he did begin life by serving the Revolutionary cause, and now, in his arrogance, had set himself up above the divine right of kings; and for royalist England to make peace with such a man was, to the last degree, humiliating to their pride.

Or else a bore.

CHAPTER VII

BUT this irreconcilable attitude on the part of a few young "bloods" was obviously not shared by the mass of the people.

Thought of the Peace Treaty had gone to everyone's head like wine. While the crowd surged through the streets, invaded the Strand and Trafalgar Fields, yelled itself hoarse in front of the Mansion House, or chanted hymns outside Westminster and St. Paul's, Society gave vent to its feelings more luxuriously, though no less noisily, inside Drury Lane Theatre. Here, the masked ball, hastily organised to celebrate Peace, was a brilliant success. They had all come; the gilded youth of London had turned out drawers and cupboards for scraps wherewith to fashion dominoes and masks and fantastic costumes in which to array themselves.

The drop-scene from Herr Gluck's opera "Alceste," recently produced at Drury Lane, had been requisitioned so as to form an attractive classical background to this very modern scene, whilst

the whole of the parterre had been raised with trestles and boards to the level of the stage, thus providing, through ingenuity and a lavish expenditure of money, an immense dancing floor, whereon, to the strains of an admirable orchestra, English jig and Polish mazurka, French minuet and schottische, as well as the new Austrian waltz, succeeded one another with but short intervals.

The boxes all round were filled with spectators, ostensibly come in order to watch the merry-making below; but in reality these boxes were the favoured recesses where, behind hastily-drawn curtains and under cover of velvet masks, assignations were made and love vows exchanged without fear of detection.

And those who knew everything and gossiped of more than they knew, declared that the dispossessed King of France, or, at any rate, his brother the Comte d'Artois, had driven over from Hartwell determined to shed his melancholy, if only for one night. But that was probably only a *canard*, for the French Royal Family took very little part, if any, in society functions; and of a truth, they could not look with any joy on this Peace Treaty which had reconciled their greatest friend, England, with the usurper of their throne.

Be that as it may, one important personage was certainly present at Drury Lane that night. This was Monsieur Otto, the French Ambassador who had negotiated the Peace Treaty. He was attended by his right-hand man, Colonel Lauriston. The two Frenchmen had come to pay their respects to Lady de Genneville in her box; that pretty blonde whose extravagance and irresponsible escapades had given her elderly spouse much cause for uneasiness. The lady was slightly bored by the dry conversation of her visitors, for she had heard much of French gallantry, and was disappointed that these two dryasdust diplomats could talk of nothing but the atrocious English climate, or the marvellous personality of Bonaparte, and seemed totally impervious to the fusillade of her bright eyes.

Fortunately, the door of her box was constantly assailed by other visitors, dominoes, harlequins, sprites or gnomes, all eager to pay homage to the acknowledged Queen of Beauty. There was a constant coming and going in and out of the box, flowers, *billets-doux*, *bonbons* were brought by that host of young dandies who thought it more of an honour to receive a cool smile from Charmion de Genneville's exquisite lips than marked favours from any other society star.

"Saint-Denys is here. Has your ladyship seen him?" an impudent-looking young Pierrot remarked eagerly.

"No. Where?"

"Just down below the fifth—no!—the sixth box over there, in the grey domino, leaning against the pillar . . ."

"I see him. I thought he would have been too bored to come."

"I expect he has planned something for to-night," remarked a grotesque Pantaloon, whilst a Grand Turk added solemnly, "That's the best of Saint-Denys, he always has a surprise in store."

"They say he has planned to have the Duc de Berry crowned King of France in Westminster Abbey," declared the young Pierrot.

"And to abduct the French Ambassador," a ferocious-looking pirate averred, "and to hold him in durance . . ."

But he got no further with this awesome suggestion, for he had received a punch in the ribs from the Pierrot and a pinch on the arm from Pantaloon. Punch and pinch caused him to set up a howl of pain, whilst the lovely Charmion burst into a ripple of laughter.

"My dear Duke," she said as solemnly as the situation allowed, "let me present you to His Excellency the French Ambassador."

"Great St. Christopher!" the ferocious-looking pirate—otherwise His Grace of Flint—ejaculated as he tried to beat a hasty retreat. But the others barred the way, and he was forced to make his bow before His Excellency and to encounter the steely glance of Colonel Lauriston, while her ladyship laughed till the tears ran down her cheeks.

"I hope," Monsieur Otto said with a wry attempt at jocularitv, "that your Grace's friend will not succeed in either of his endeavours."

"It might prove a fresh *casus belli*," the Colonel added dryly.

"My God! These Frenchmen have no sense of humour," thought the three young English jackanapes as they finally bowed themselves out of the presence of the French plenipotentiaries, two of them vowing that Flint could never open his mouth without putting his foot in it.

CHAPTER VIII

FOR a few moments Lady de Genneville found herself alone with the two Frenchmen, wishing heartily that they would take their leave, for her eyes had searched the crowd below until they rested on the grey domino who awhile ago had been pointed out to her. Her glance attracted his, and presently she made a slight movement with her hand which he seemed to interpret as an invitation,

for, after a bow of acknowledgment, he moved away from the pillar and anon disappeared through one of the swing doors.

Apparently Monsieur Otto had also followed the direction of her ladyship's gaze, for he said in that dry, unemotional manner of his: "I shall be interested to meet the young rascal."

She looked up, slightly puzzled. "Young rascal?" she said, frowning. "Surely you don't mean . . . ?"

"Lord Saint-Denys. He is coming, I think, to pay his respects . . ."

Her ladyship bridled. "How dare you?" was what she very nearly said, but recollecting her manners towards Bonaparte's envoy she merely queried coldly, "Why should your Excellency call Lord Saint-Denys a rascal?"

"Dear lady," Monsieur Otto rejoined in that throaty tone which more than suggested his German origin, "his lordship's reputation—debts, quarrels, even duels, I am told, make up the sum total of that young wastrel's life."

"La! what's that, I pray you?" she retorted. "He is a gentleman, he is young and he is English, so of course he gambles and fights and makes love to every pretty woman he meets."

Then as Monsieur Otto remained silent, conscious that he had obviously made a *faux pas*, she continued with well-controlled vehemence:

"Your Excellency called Lord Saint-Denys a wastrel, forgetting that he spent the best years of his life in fighting his country's quarrels, neglecting his fortune while he shared every conceivable hardship with the soldiers under his command. At Wetzlar—surely you heard it recounted?—with five wounds in his body and wellnigh bleeding to death he rallied his men around the flag, threatened by a picked body of your Bonaparte's hussars, and held out against vastly superior numbers for two hours till, exhausted, some thought dying, he carried the colours to safety."

Her voice broke; she was on the verge of tears.

"Rascal, he?" she continued indignantly. "The hero of a hundred gallant fights. A madcap, if you like, but in England few names in the military annals of this awful war are more honoured than his."

The ghost of a smile flickered round the Frenchman's lips. "Your ladyship knows how to defend a friend," he said.

"When a brave man is attacked," she murmured, already half ashamed of her outburst.

"I did not intend to attack Lord Saint-Denys," Monsieur Otto hastened to assure her: "That would indeed be presumption on

my part. I used the word 'rascal' wrongly, of course. I wanted to convey in my faulty English the meaning of our excellent French expression '*mauvais sujet*.' We, in France, have a great weakness for a *mauvais sujet*, and even your ladyship will admit that the hero of a hundred fights is very often that. I am told that he lost the tattered remnants of his fortune at cards in one night."

"Oh, that!" Lady de Genneville rejoined, somewhat mollified. "That is true enough. He and a few others of our *jeunesse dorée* did once, not so long ago, fall a victim to a gang of foreign aristocrats who were mere cardsharps and who pigeon-fleeced them most handsomely, and then made good their escape out of the country. Saint-Denys and the others were home on leave from the war and their spirits ran high . . . Martin, of a truth, lost a considerable sum that night."

"A sum that should have gone to his creditors, so they say."

"Perhaps," she retorted dryly; "but anyway he punished those sharks in a manner they are not like to forget."

"And how did our young hero accomplish that?" the Frenchman asked, smiling.

"Your *mauvais sujet*, Excellency, as soon as he had made up his mind to punish the rogues who had swindled him and his friends, tracked them down to Holland where they had taken refuge. He had less than a month at his disposal before rejoining the troops, but within a fortnight he had got in touch with them, bamboozled them so that they followed him to England, and then set the police on their heels, and now they are cooling them in Wandsworth Jail and are for ever debarred from exercising their nefarious trade again."

"How interesting!" His Excellency remarked. "But why are they debarred? Surely in England you do not hang cardsharps?"

"No, Excellency, we do not," here broke in a pleasant, if somewhat drawly voice from the rear of the box. "My respects to you, sir, and let me repeat we do not hang cardsharps, though we certainly ought to."

Lady de Genneville gave a startled little cry, for the door of the box had been noiselessly opened and it was not until the tall figure in the grey domino was quite close to her that she was aware of his presence. He bent low over the pretty hand that was graciously extended to him, and then gave the French plenipotentiaries a courteous bow.

"You were honouring me, sir," he said, addressing Monsieur Otto, "by speaking of me?"

"Indeed we were, milor," the ambassador replied, "until the

moment when I marvelled how a number of cardsharps whom your laws do not punish with death are debarred from further mischief. We have many rogues in France these days, and I would like to know how the miracle was accomplished."

"'Twas no miracle, sir," Saint-Denys rejoined lightly. "The police being somewhat slow in their methods I took advantage of a day's leisure to go and meet at Harwich that gang of miscreants who had just arrived from Holland. I spent half an hour, sir, in a private room of the 'Merry Jack Tar' inn in cutting off the right ear of each of the rascallions who had robbed me and my friends, and making them disgorge their booty as a ransom for their left ear. Frankly, do you think that in future any gentleman would sit down and play cards with men who had only one ear?"

"You did that, milor?"

It was Colonel Lauriston who had spoken. He regarded Saint-Denys with a stare which was almost ludicrous in its obvious astonishment and horror. Monsieur Otto, being more diplomatic, became apparently absorbed in the contemplation of the crowd down below. Saint-Denys broke into loud laughter.

"I would like to make a guess, Monsieur le Colonel," he said lightly, "as to what your thoughts are at this moment. May I try?"

Colonel Lauriston made a polite gesture of assent.

"You were thinking, sir," Saint-Denys continued unperturbed, "what savages these English are!"

Lauriston tried to protest.

"Milor, I assure you——"

"Nay! Do not apologise, I entreat. I am so ready to admit that we English are savages. In matters of honour certainly. Now your civilised Frenchman would have fought a well-ordered duel over this affair, and given a lot of rascals vast satisfaction probably by getting pinked for his pains."

He paused for a moment and laughed again. It was an infectious laugh in which all but the two Frenchmen joined heartily. Then he concluded lightly:

"We in England, sir, get more satisfaction out of cutting a noble rascal's ears, than by the display of elegant swordsmanship."

With that he rose, bowed very politely, if somewhat ironically to the Frenchmen; then turned to offer his arm to the lovely Charmion.

"What says your ladyship?" he murmured; "shall this rascal have the privilege of escorting you to supper?"

And thus was the incident closed. Chatting, laughing, flirting, Lady de Genneville, on the arm of his lordship, made her way

toward the supper-room, leaving the two Frenchmen, after the exchange of conventional courtesies, to marvel at the eccentricities of these mad English.

CHAPTER IX

THIS interlude occurred during the small hours of the morning. It was after that, that the fun waxed fast and furious. The ladies of Society, for the most part, went home soon after supper, for this was an age when it was no disgrace for any gentleman, young or old, to drink more than was good for him, and with half the gilded youth of London in its cups, Theatre Royal, Drury Lane, an hour or two after midnight, was no longer a proper place for any save frisky young matrons.

Saint-Denys took his leave of Lady de Genneville at the door of her coach. He raised her hand to his lips. She pressed the hand that held hers.

"You will come to my rout to-morrow, Martin?" she murmured with a wistful little sigh.

"Your ladyship will excuse if . . ."

"Martin!" she entreated.

"Dear lady," he rejoined, "I am such poor company."

"But why? In Heaven's name, why?"

"I know not: I think I am sick of life."

"Did I not know you, for a stony-hearted egoist, my friend," Charmion de Genneville said with sudden earnestness, "I would begin to think that you were suffering from unrequited love."

"You would be right. Am I not in love with you?"

"Do not mock, Martin. I am serious."

"Serious? When you deign to think that I am wallowing in an unfortunate love affair! I only wish I were, it might prove amusing."

"You are incorrigible," she said. "Go back in there," she added, pointing to the foyer of the playhouse, which at this hour seemed like a veritable pandemonium with women giggling and shrieking, men shouting or singing bibulous songs, with the dense crowds swaying and swirling and twirling in the mad intoxication of pleasure and of noise.

"Flint and the others will miss you."

"Flint and the others bore me to distraction."

"Then come home with me."

"If I thought Sir Timothy was from home . . ."

"He is not. He is at home with his tisane and his gout."

"Well, then?"

"Well, then, what will you do?"

"Go home."

She smiled. "And so to bed?"

"Not I. I have work to do."

This time she laughed. "Work?" she exclaimed. "You?"

"Serious work."

"Such as?"

"I must sign my name one hundred times before the crack of dawn."

"Sign your name a hundred times? Whatever for?"

"Important papers . . ."

"What papers?"

"You shall see for yourself, fair lady."

"When?"

"To-morrow. When you have risen from your rest and finished your toilet you shall know all about it."

She was about to insist when the uniformed porter's stentorian voice broke in on this intimate little colloquy.

"Lady de Genneville's carriage stops the way."

It was the signal for her ladyship's carriage to make way for others, and Saint-Denys had only the fraction of a minute in which to imprint a last kiss on the pretty ungloved hand which rested on the *portière*, and then to step back quickly as the elegant barouche with its C springs and silver harness gave a sudden lurch and slowly drove away.

Then, wrapping his grey domino more closely round him, he started to walk down the lane in the direction of Mayfair.

CHAPTER X

THE next day, by the time the beautiful Lady de Genneville had dismissed her *coiffeur*, her milliner and her maid, the news was all over the Town.

It was yet another prank of that madcap, Saint-Denys, so they all said.

"Have you read it, my dear fellow?"

"Gad! I nearly died seeing those toothless gaffers staring at it open-mouthed."

"Already at seven o'clock, I am told, there was a regular crowd round the Exchange. The police had to charge . . ."

"The man's mad, I say. Stark, staring mad." That is what most of them said.

"But what's he done now?" These were the ones who had not yet heard the news.

"Don't you know?"

"Haven't you seen?"

"My dear fellow, I've only just . . ."

"Those placards all over the town?"

"What placards?"

"Come and I'll show you. Will you come along, too, Hastings?"

"Rather!"

"And I."

"And I."

"We'll all come."

And the merry throng of young dandies, forming fours and linking arms, followed their leader up the lane and through the narrow streets which debouch on the Strand. Avoiding Covent Garden Market, where hustling, bustling, busy life would have impeded their progress, they stepped along at a brisk rate, chattering, gesticulating, laughing like a troop of schoolboys, charging head down into anything that barred their way. Those who were in the know vowed that never in all their born days had they seen anything to equal Saint-Denys's latest monkey trick.

It was close on eight o'clock of this cold March morning, and the lively throng had trooped out of Drury Lane. They had trooped out because the orchestra had played its last tune and the ball had come to an end. They also trooped out because one of them had come running in from outside and scattered the news of Saint-Denys's amazing exploit.

Close on eight o'clock, and broad daylight! Busy Londoners, tradesmen and 'prentices had long since been astir. Some of these, at the corner of Villiers Street, stared open-mouthed at these merry-andrews dressed in motley, some as ferocious pirates, others as gay Pierrots or grotesque Pantaloons, or more soberly in silk dominoes. A murmur went the round.

"What a crowd of wasters!"

"Idlers! fops! ne'er-do-wells!"

"They're all over the place," muttered a gaffer through his beard, "now that there's no more fighting to keep them busy."

"If this is peace," declared another, "then give me war and Boney all the time."

But the noisy, chattering crowd went on regardless until, reaching Bedford Street, their leader came to a halt. He it was who

was dressed as a pirate, with a red scarf wound round his head and huge pistols stuck in his belt. His arms and chest were bare and stained with walnut juice, his feet were thrust in immense cavalier boots. With a dramatic gesture he indicated a printed placard which had been posted up at the corner of the street.

"There you are!" he exclaimed, with the pride of a showman conscious of the attraction of his wares.

Here, too, a few quidnuncs had gathered; they had to be somewhat roughly thrust into the gutter to make way for these exquisites. Apparently these placards, of which there were a hundred all over the town, had been posted up during the night and had created a regular stir. Curiosity was on the *qui vive*. Comments ran freely, some in mild amusement, others not altogether free from contempt.

"These macaronis!"

"Pity Boney did not knock more of them on the head."

"A madman in truth," muttered the seedy solicitor's clerk to the out-at-elbows chemist's assistant.

"Would I could earn that reward," sighed the medical student in the ear of his sweetheart, "for then we could be married on the morrow."

"Bah!" ejaculated the elderly attorney. "You don't believe that anyone is going to get that money, do you? Why, the fellow, if he paid it, wouldn't have a bean left."

Yet there it was, almost incredible in its amazing proposal, but nevertheless printed in bold letters for everyone to read, and signed with one of the most honoured names in the land.

"Well!" exclaimed those who had been led hither to read this remarkable effusion. "Well!"

"Of all the . . ."

"Well!" they all exclaimed again.

"No one but Saint-Denys could have thought of such lunacy!"

"I didn't think he had £5,000 left."

"I suppose he means it, though."

"Of course. He signed every one of the hundred placards with his own hand."

"I've a good notion to suggest to him . . ."

"And I."

"I, too, have an idea. . . ."

That is what a good many of them said, and then fell into thoughtful silence. Most of these young jackanapes were up to their eyes in debt, for this was the age when young men had little else to do to amuse themselves save gambling and drinking. A

£5,000 REWARD

BE IT KNOWN to all those whom it may concern that I, Martin Leroy Charles Saint-Denys, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune in the peerage of the United Kingdom, do hereby undertake to pay the above sum of money to whomsoever will deliver me from an incurable disease known as boredom, which is sapping my vitality, impairing my physical health, and slowly dragging me down to a premature grave.

Whosoever will provide me against that devastating malady with a remedy which, on application, shall prove efficacious, will receive, together with my gratitude, the sum of £5,000.

But for the guidance of those interested in this scientific problem I would warn them that sundry remedies have at different times been tried by me and found wanting, such as :

Piracy on the high seas;
Highway robbery;
The loss of a fortune at faro.

Note also that I have had ten years of soldiering, campaigning and of Bonaparte's artillery, and that these are now barred owing to this begad peace.

Also that I draw the line at :

Card-sharping;
Rape and
Assassination.

My life being worthless, I'll take any risk of ending it, anywhere and anyhow, save on the gallows.

GOD SAVE THE KING

remnant of Puritanism in the English blood has at all times prevented the theatre from becoming really popular; and these last ten years of strenuous warfare had disaccustomed them from frequenting old Drury Lane or the Italian opera. Dancing was no longer greatly in vogue. The minuet was complicated and rather slow, and the new Viennese waltz not thought to be altogether *bon ton*.

There was nothing for it but gambling—gambling in every form: hazard, dice, cards, betting—betting above all—just a futile way of losing money—anything for excitement in the intervals of fighting Bonaparte. M. Otto had been quite right when he averred that Lord Saint-Denys, that prince of gamblers, had lost a fortune one night, and another a year later. Probably the £5,000 which he was offering as a reward was the last remnant of what had once been a princely income. It was just like him to throw away that last remnant on such a foolish prank.

But Saint-Denys was a man of his word. He had promised the reward and he would pay it, even if it meant parting with his last shilling. And his young friends—just such madcaps as he was himself—nursed, at sight of those placards, happy thoughts of how to earn £5,000 without undue hard work.

No wonder that they all fell to musing until suddenly the ferocious pirate, who was none other than the young Duke of Flint, exclaimed suddenly:

“And now let’s go to bed!”

Whereupon they all realised that the morning was no longer young, that the gaffers round them appeared more and more hostile, and that they themselves were dead with sleep, having danced and revelled, drunk and gambled and shouted themselves hoarse for twelve hours on end. So they set up a mighty cheer and turned in several directions to regain their homes, just as the clock of St. Martin’s-in-the-Fields struck eight.

CHAPTER XI

SIR TIMOTHY DE GENNEVILLE who, despite his gout, betook himself every morning to his club to drink a glass of port—a dose of poison, his doctor declared—before midday, returned to his mansion in Carlton House Terrace in time for luncheon full of choler at the stupendous tale.

“That young man ought to be deported,” he declared, and added one or two oaths to emphasise his feelings in this matter.

"He is a scandal to our aristocracy and shames us before these French diplomats. What will Bonaparte think of our English youth? . . ."

"That it is the bravest youth in all the world," his lady retorted hotly, "and the toughest enemy. But what has happened now," she added more lightly, "to put you about at this hour?"

In silence she allowed her spouse to recount to her at full length the sensation which Saint-Denys's placards had created all over the town. Sir Timothy had obtained possession of one of these, and now, his temper further tormented by the twinge in his big toe, he read its contents aloud to her Ladyship, interspersing the reading with a variety of oaths such as gentlemen were wont to indulge in these days, and comments that were anything but flattering to the author of the printed sheet.

"I wonder if he has had many offers already?" was Lady de Genneville's sole answer to her husband's wrath.

"I hope that no man has been fool enough to trust that young jackanapes who has already frittered away two fortunes in such follies as this," Sir Timothy muttered, and with a vicious snarl he threw the offending sheet into the grate.

"Make no mistake, Sir Timothy," her ladyship said quietly. "Lord Saint-Denys is a man of his word. He will pay what he has promised, even it prove to be his last shilling. And now," she added lightly, "shall we go in to luncheon?"

Upstairs and downstairs Lord Saint-Denys was the hero of the hour, for had he not provided half London with food for gossip? The talk at the clubs and the servants' halls, in the assembly-rooms and the coffee-houses, as well as round the gaming-tables, was more of him than of the Peace Treaty. Everyone hoped that he would be present at Lady de Genneville's rout, and young and old, ladies and cavaliers, were ready to ply him with eager questions. Had he received any suggestions yet? Had he been tempted to allot the princely reward?

A few hours' rest had already borne fruit. Young bloods there were who were ready with suggestions which they thought marvellous: a love affair with the wife of Napoleon Bonaparte; a conspiracy to upset the Peace Treaty by challenging Monsieur Otto to a duel; the circumnavigation of the globe in one of the new topsail schooners were some of the ideas which had taken shape in these feather-brains.

But Saint-Denys did not put in an appearance at Lady de Genneville's rout.

All day he had sat in the library of his beautiful house in

Berkeley Square behind his bureau, with a huge ledger in front of him. He kept open house. Every visitor, however humble, was introduced into his presence by Mr. Bunch, the impeccable major-domo and last relic of this once lavish bachelor establishment: name and address, if any, were then entered in the ledger on one side of the page, and the suggested remedy for the incurable malady of boredom from which his lordship suffered was noted on the other. All in his lordship's own hand and without the suggestion of a smile. After which the visitor was conducted by the majestic Mr. Bunch to the servants' hall and offered a glass of excellent sherry which was never refused. Of course, this procedure did not apply to gentlemen who also came to Berkeley Square in considerable numbers. Although their names and suggestions were entered in the ledger, they were not kept waiting in the hall with the rest of the crowd, but shown into the boudoir, where cigars, sherry and cards helped to while away their time.

As for the ladies—and there were some, too—they came for the most part provided with suggestions for love intrigues which would have all the elements of surprise, danger and passionate fulfilment conducive to the dissipation of the most incurable boredom. These suggestions were generally accompanied by a play of eyes and lips and lashes to which, alas! Lord Saint-Denys remained entirely impervious; Mr. Bunch declaring afterwards that "the goings-on of them 'ussies after they found that 'is lordship would not fall a victim to their fascinations, was persistively scandalous."

At the end of the day—there had only been a brief interval for luncheon which Mr. Bunch served to his lordship on a tray in the library—two hundred names and two hundred suggestions had been duly entered in the huge ledger. Lord Saint-Denys was tired and his hand ached.

"I shall be suffering from writer's cramp, Bunch," he said, "if I go on."

He closed down the big ledger with a loud bang, rose from the desk and sank into the nearest arm-chair.

"No more visitors to-night," he said. "Tell anyone who may be waiting that I shall see them to-morrow. Give me a glass of sherry and a cigar, and in half an hour I shall be for bed."

The stately Mr. Bunch, after he had seen to the candles and otherwise ministered to his lordship's comfort, withdrew. Saint-Denys, with a sigh of content, settled himself in a capacious arm-chair in front of the fire, with the cigar between his fingers, his head resting against a cushion, luxuriating in idleness after his

strenuous day. He looked at this moment extraordinarily like that portrait which Lawrence painted of him a year or two later, one of the gems of the celebrated Saint-Denys collection of eighteenth-century portraiture. The square forehead and straight brow, the somewhat harsh features, the deep-set eyes of an indescribable colour, neither grey nor blue nor hazel, at times of a velvety darkness reminiscent of the south, at others light and steely, but always marred by that almost insolent expression of boredom and of detachment which repelled. Some wag once said of Saint-Denys that he looked like a humorist disguised as a dullard, and there was some truth in that, for now and then there would come a twinkle in the eyes, or a curve of pleasant irony around the lips which would suddenly light up the whole face and make it very attractive, until that air of boredom once more settled over it and irritated by its obvious affection.

Nevertheless, in justice to this characteristic product of an artificial age, it must be put on record that affectation was no part of Saint-Denys's attitude toward life. He was at this time not yet thirty years of age. He had spent ten of these in one of the most strenuous campaigns ever imposed on the endurance of any army. He had enjoyed that life while it lasted; had felt neither fatigue nor privations, being possessed of iron nerve and an infinite capacity for enduring pain: he had, in fact, revelled in the keen sensation of fighting and killing, of constant danger, of victory and even of defeat. Was it not natural, then, that he should find irksome the sybaritic life imposed in time of peace upon a gentleman of his rank who hadn't another fortune to lose and who was sick to death of the perpetual round of amusements, of balls and of routs? There was no affectation in this; and in very truth Saint-Denys was too proud to play up to the gallery, too disdainful of the multitude to thrust himself deliberately before its gaze. His printed placards, his huge ledger and formal entries therein were in no sense of the word a pose. Futile they might seem, even insane, but they were the outward signs of a genuine desire on his part to find a new zest in life.

CHAPTER XII

"WHAT is it now, Bunch?"

His lordship, unpleasantly aroused from his half-slumber, looked with stern disapproval at his major-domo.

"A visitor, my lord," Mr. Bunch replied.

"Did I not say that I would not see anyone else to-night?"

"You did, my lord. But the . . . the . . . er—person is him-portunate."

"A gentleman, Bunch?"

"French, my lord," was Mr. Bunch's non-committal reply.

"Speaks English?"

"Broken, my lord."

"Tell him to go to hell."

"I did, my lord. He said he would, but would see your lordship first. He said he thought your lordship would show him the way."

"A wag, Bunch?"

"Hap-parently, my lord."

"Show him in."

The majestic Mr. Bunch retired, to return a moment later accompanied by a short, fat man, whose appearance at once aroused his lordship's curiosity. He had a long face, with high, hooked nose and very dark beady eyes, wore no wig, but a few strands of black hair had been carefully coaxed over a very shiny pate in a futile endeavour to conceal its baldness. The whole aspect of the man was indeed so comic that it suggested the make-up of a clever comedian rather than a real personality. It was only the eyes that were arresting, for they were sharp and keen; they were very small and the man kept them tightly screwed up so that they almost disappeared behind their fleshy lids. Nevertheless, they gave the impression that those tiny dark pin-points saw everything, noted everything, were all the time alert and suspicious.

Mr. Bunch, having ushered him into his lordship's presence, once more retired, closing the door after him. The new-comer stood quite still on the very edge of the oriental carpet while the major-domo's measured footsteps could still be heard retreating across the hall. Then as a kind of solemn silence seemed to settle on the stately mansion, his beady eyes travelled round the vast panelled room, which, beautiful as it was, had an air of grandeur that was past. His lordship had already risen and gone over to the bureau. He sat down and with utmost seriousness reopened the ponderous ledger. Then he pointed to a chair and said courteously :

"Will you be seated, sir?"

He watched his unwelcome visitor tripping lightly across the room—a grotesque figure, he thought, with that big paunch above the spindle legs. Nobody but a Frenchman would wear such

ill-cut pantaloons. And, heavens above, what a hat, what boots! Bunch was a fool to show him in.

Then suddenly he met the glance of those small beady eyes and at once his thoughts veered in another direction. The man was certainly odd—grotesque! But he was not a nonentity and obviously not a fool. There was something in the glance of those eyes that revealed a will—the power to command, the magnetism which draws one human being to another. Saint-Denys closed the big ledger with marked deliberation and then said with grave politeness:

"And now, sir, will you be so kind as to tell me to what cause I may ascribe the honour of your visit?"

The little man waited for a moment as if to collect his thoughts; then he replied:

"Partly, my lord, to the placards which you have caused to be posted all over the town."

"And partly?"

"To my desire to find a man willing and able to engage in a hazardous enterprise."

Saint-Denys smiled.

"And so you thought that I . . . ?"

By this time the little man had settled himself down comfortably in his chair, had put his hat down on the floor and clasped his hands over his ample figure. With his head cocked on one side, his tiny eyes twinkling like beads in the candle-light, he reminded Saint-Denys of those little gnomes which he had seen in German picture-books and which are said to haunt the great pine-woods in the Black Forest.

"Let me explain, milor," he now said blandly. "The Duc de Berry, who is own nephew to King Louis XVIII and, therefore, future King of France . . . you know who I mean, milor?"

"Certainly I do."

"And you are acquainted with Monseigneur?"

"I have never had the privilege of meeting him."

"The Royal Family live a very retired life at Hartwell."

"Quite so. . . . But as you were saying, sir?"

Saint-Denys's mysterious visitor was silent for a moment, while his slender finger sought the pocket of his waistcoat.

"This is an excellent likeness of Monseigneur," he said and held out a miniature encircled in brilliants to his host.

Saint-Denys examined it attentively. There was no mistaking the hooked nose and high, somewhat receding forehead of the Bourbons. Without a word he handed the miniature back to his visitor.

"The Duc de Berry, milor," the latter resumed after he had restored the trinket to his waistcoat pocket, "went over to France a week or so ago. He is young, and was tired, apparently, of a life of inactivity here in England. And so he has gone to France in order to take personal command of the irregular troops that are fighting for their King in Normandy and Brittany."

"The devil he did!" Saint-Denys remarked with obvious indifference.

Indeed he was beginning to lose interest in this funny little man, who talked to him of men and things that could not possibly concern an English gentleman: and he was beginning to wonder how in the world he could most politely and most easily get rid of his importunate visitor, when the latter resumed with solemn emphasis:

"You are right, milor, in invoking the Prince of Darkness in connection with this insane enterprise. The Duc de Berry, being young, listened neither to advice nor to warning. He has run his head into a noose, and God only knows what the outcome of it all may be!

"But I fail to interest you, milor," the little man went on, as Saint-Denys politely smothered a yawn.

"Indeed not, sir, I assure you; but if you'll pardon my saying so, I don't quite see——"

"What all this has to do with you," the little man broke in complacently. "I'll tell you. You are no doubt aware, milor, that His Majesty the King of France has an army of adherents in Normandy."

Saint-Denys smiled.

"Here in England, sir, we are led to understand that that army is only a horde of outlaws and brigands——"

"Admirable brigands," the other broke in with more vehemence than he had displayed hitherto. "Make no mistake, milor. Brigands they may be, but admirable, for all that; brave, fanatical, if you like, but loyal and reckless of danger. The tragedy consists in the fact that they are commanded by a hot-headed fire-eater named Jacques Cottereau—a man of noble birth, descended, in the strict sense of the word, from one of the oldest families in Normandy—who leads them into every kind of unavowable enterprises. Under his guidance they have become nothing but a lot of lawless vagabonds. The local people call them '*Chouans*,' because their rallying-cry is that of the screech-owl. Their arms, of course, are inefficient and antiquated, and their methods have become those of highway robbers. Bonaparte's police officers, on the other

hand, are astute enough not to press them too closely. Literally, they are giving them plenty of rope wherewith to hang them presently. And that is where all that brigandage is leading them—to the scaffold. Tragedy enough in itself, for most of these men were decent fellows once—farmers, fisherfolk, fathers of families! What will become of them God only knows! But to us over here who are watching events, who know that ultimately the cause of the kingdom of France will triumph through the intervention of England and the allies, the tragedy has suddenly become a veritable disaster, for now the Heir to the Throne is involved in all these villainies and unless something is done, and done quickly, eternal disgrace will rest on the Royal Family of France.”

During this impassioned harangue the little man had risen to his feet. He stood there now with head upraised, no longer a grotesque figure, but one full of vitality and determination which gave a strange dignity to his small stature and to his ludicrous bulk. Even his hands, one of which rested on the knob of the chair, though somewhat effeminate in shape, showed that they could, when needed, be raised in command. And Saint-Denys no longer felt inclined to laugh; strangely enough he was no longer bored.

“I dare say, milor,” he said, “that you marvel why I have come to you with a tale which no doubt you have heard many a time before. I’ll tell you: I named the man Jacques Cottereau just now. He is the evil genius of our cause. Reckless, unscrupulous, he sticks at nothing to attain his ends. His ambition and fanaticism are boundless. He is an extraordinarily clever man, and in his turbulent mind he sees himself as the restorer of the monarchy, the right hand man of the King of France, a ruler of princes, something between a Richelieu and a King-maker. He has been in England, got hold of the Duc de Berry, and persuaded him to take command of what he is pleased to call ‘a new irregular army’ which he has raised. The Duke, alas! listened to him and went over to France some ten days ago. By a stroke of good luck we succeeded over here—never mind how—in getting hold of Cottereau’s papers, his plans of brigandage and highway robbery, which would horrify the Duke if he knew of them. Can you imagine, milor, the future King of France being involved in an affair of common brigandage, which, if discovered, would bring him before the local police on a criminal charge? It is, of course, unthinkable. Unfortunately, Cottereau has obtained extraordinary influence over him. He is young, and like you, milor, adventure appeals to him. Secret meetings, guerrilla warfare, underground lairs! What would you? He loves excitement and he is young.”

The little man paused. He was breathless, for he had talked at great length without interruption from Saint-Denys. Indeed, the latter had listened to him almost spellbound, held by the magnetism of those eyes, by the dignity and enthusiasm of that strange, no longer grotesque figure, and by the charm of the voice rising and falling in smooth cadences, as the speaker emphasised a point here or there.

After a few seconds the speaker continued with grave emphasis:

"And now, my lord, let me come to the point, for I must not tax your patience too far. The same lucky chance that enabled some of my—some of our people to get hold of Cottereau's papers also enabled them to detain him here in England. So for the moment the Duc de Berry is free from the man's immediate influence. But Cottereau is such an extraordinary man, so full of courage and resource, that he will find the means of evading us and returning to France, probably within the next twenty-four hours. Now it is of the utmost importance that the papers I spoke of just now should be in the hands of the Duc de Berry with as little delay as possible. When he realises to what infamous enterprises he has committed himself, he will, I know, turn from them in horror and return to England, here to await in patience, like we all do, the day when the usurper, Bonaparte, will be hurled back into the gutter whence he rose."

"And did you think, sir, that I . . . ?" Saint-Denys asked.

"Why not? You are bored—I offer you a cure for the most inveterate ennui."

". . . that I should——?"

"Go to France . . . find the Duc de Berry . . . give him the papers which I will place in your hands . . . Why not?"

Why not, indeed? Saint-Denys hardly noticed that the little man had ceased speaking, for he had fallen into a fascinating day-dream: the London season, the balls, the routs, the gaming-tables, the glamour and luxury of an exquisite's life, had all receded into a hazy background. His friends—the Duke of Flint, my lord Hastings, and all the others, even the beautiful women of his acquaintance—the lovely Charmion, the adorable Elaine, this or that particular star in fashion's firmament—they appeared like puppets moving only when the strings were pulled that gave them life, with no volition of their own. It was the world which the strange little man with the big paunch and delicate hands had pictured before him which alone seemed alive and real. The undisciplined horde of outlaws out there in Normandy, the heir to the throne of France led blindly to a shameful doom, the fanatical

leader whose unavowed crimes threatened a Royal house with disgrace—they alone lived a life that seemed worth while. Every day brought with it its quota of danger, its fight for life; death lurking round every corner and every tree, in every hovel or impoverished château. And Saint-Denys became conscious of an unconquerable desire to share that life, to sleep in underground lairs rather than in downy beds, with hand on musket and ear glued to the ground. Away with sybaritic luxury, with feasting and gossiping and dancing! Saint-Denys could feel it in his bones that the romantic soil of Normandy would be the grave of his boredom.

And while he dreamed this enchanting dream there fell on the vast panelled room a great and solemn silence—silence only broken by the measured ticking of the priceless Boule clock on the wall and the stertorous breathing of the strange visitor, until suddenly from afar there sounded the rattle of coach-wheels on the cobble-stones of the Square, the call of the night-watchman, the distant shouts of revellers returning to their homes. These familiar sounds roused Saint-Denys from his reverie. He looked straight into the face of the magician who had conjured up such fascinating visions before his eyes and the pertinent question rose to his lips:

"But why should you, sir, wish to entrust such a delicate mission to me? I am a foreigner . . . a stranger to you . . ."

The other smiled and said simply:

"You are young, milor; you have nothing more to lose—am I right?—you are bored. You are English and yet you speak French like a native. All these will be valuable assets in your enterprise."

For some time now the conversation had drifted into French, which tongue to Saint-Denys was as familiar as his own. He acknowledged the estimate of him with an inclination of the head.

"One more question, sir," he then said, "and I have done . . . or nearly."

"And what is that?"

"Can you, perchance, tell me if in the whole of Normandy I shall be likely to find anyone friendly to my project?"

The little man shook his head gravely.

"You will find more suspicion than friendliness, my lord. Cottereau holds the country-side in the hollow of his hand. The men follow him to the death. They are suspicious of every stranger and look upon every man as a spy. Till recently they trusted the English, but since you have made peace with Bonaparte they look

upon you as enemies. Trust no man, woman or child over there, my lord. Let no living soul know of your mission. Cottereau has a long arm and his eyes are keen. If you should fail to find the Duc de Berry . . ."

Saint-Denys gave a quick laugh and a shrug. "If I should fail!" he exclaimed with sublime self-confidence.

"Then you are going to say Yes, my lord?"

"Did you doubt it, sir?"

"Your hand on it, my lord." The little man advanced as far as the bureau and held out his white womanish hand. Saint-Denys rose and grasped it, murmuring to himself, "How very French!"

The stranger then took a bundle of papers from the breast pocket of his coat and held them out to Saint-Denys.

"Swear to me, my lord, that you will guard these papers with your life until such time as you deliver them into the hands of Monseigneur le Duc de Berry, future King of France. Swear that you will not divulge the purpose of your mission to any living soul, that while you are in France you will serve the Duc de Berry if needs be with your life, and that you will not leave his side until you have seen him safely on his way back to England. Swear it, my lord, upon your honour!"

"I swear it."

"Then, milor, with these papers I place the honour of the House of Bourbon and the life of the future King of France in your hands."

The man was priceless, ridiculous, melodramatic, but he was a man for all that. He knew what he wanted and knew how to get it. Saint-Denys took the papers and laid them down on the bureau. He put his hand on them, thus accepting the trust. He, too, felt ridiculous and melodramatic, as ridiculous as any Englishman would feel in solemn moments that called forth a display of emotion or enthusiasm. But now he had pledged his word and the die was cast. Nor did he wish to go back on it. Like the true gambler he was he had staked his all on a final throw. His estates, his houses, his priceless works of art were mortgaged to the hilt. All that he possessed in the world were a few thousand pounds on which no gentleman could possibly live. And live he would! Live for a brief while, lay his bones perhaps on the wild shores of Normandy rather than vegetate in boredom for a few more years.

Suddenly a thought struck him and he burst out laughing. "And now, sir," he said gaily, "perhaps you will kindly tell me your name."

The little man appeared to hesitate for a second or two, then he said lightly: "Will you call me Legros—Louis Legros?"

Saint-Denys shrugged. "If you like," he said lightly.

"It will serve, I think."

"Then I suppose, Monsieur—er—Legros," Saint-Denys continued with a smile, "you consider you have earned that five thousand pounds of me?"

Legros spread out his podgy hands with that gesture peculiar to the Latin races and retorted simply, "Well, haven't I?"

"You certainly have. Shall I make out a banker's draft for you now or . . . ?"

"Rather will you be so kind, my lord, as to hand the money over to the Duc de Berry? He will know how best to use it over there."

Monsieur Legros then took a ring from his finger and held it out to Saint-Denys.

"This will ensure," he said, "the Duc de Berry looking upon you, milor, as a friend."

It was a large signet ring with elaborate arms carved in turquoise-matrix. Saint-Denys slipped it on his finger, after which he said:

"If there is anything else, Monsieur Legros, that you could tell me for my guidance, it would be a help and it would save time. Where, for instance, should I be most likely to come on the tracks of the Duc de Berry? The province of Normandy is vast . . ."

Monsieur Legros shook his head dolefully.

"Ah!" he sighed. "That's just the trouble. I have told you all I can—the rest is for your own initiative. Among Cottereau's papers you will find a list of the names of his principal adherents—*seigneurs* and owners of châteaux. It is among these that the Duke is most likely to seek hospitality. But we have no means of communicating with him, and cannot tell you where and how to find him. He landed at the cliffs of Biville, a desolate and lonely part of the coast. Not very far inland from there is the boundary of the property which belongs to the de Marillacs, who are among our—among my most intimate friends. The head of the family has been fighting with the allied armies, but is in England now. He has a daughter whose name escapes me for the moment, for her father always speaks of her as *ma fleur*. She is the only living soul in that distressful province whom you can trust; the only one who has probed Cottereau's tortuous soul and knows to what depths of infamy his fanaticism will carry him. If there were more men and women like Mademoiselle de Marillac, the honour of the

Royal House of France would, indeed, be safe. If you can get in touch with her, my lord, you are in that one instance relieved of your oath not to speak of your mission."

"I will remember," Saint-Denys said lightly. "Mademoiselle de Marillac you said, sir? And her father speaks of her as his flower! I'll not ask you if she is young and comely, for mystery and romance always go hand in hand. I will remember Mademoiselle de Marillac. And let me see! You mentioned the cliffs of Biville . . ."

After which and far away into the night the two men sat together talking over the details of Saint-Denys's journey to France. It was only in the small hours of the morning that his lordship finally escorted Monsieur Legros as far as the hall where Mr. Bunch stood waiting to show the visitor out. At the foot of the front-door steps there were two men on the watch. As soon as Monsieur Legros appeared one of them gave a sign, and a coach which had been standing round the corner advanced to the door. The coachman and footman on the box were in dark livery. The footman jumped down and opened the carriage door. All three men stood, hat in hand, while Monsieur Legros stepped into the coach, which then drove off.

Mr. Bunch saw all that, and wondered for a moment; then thought no more about it.

And all the while over at Carlton House Terrace, at Lady de Genneville's rout, young belles and beaux danced and flirted and chattered, wondering all the time what had become of their favourite exquisite, the prince of frolic and laughter, the king of gamblers, the ever-bored, ever-disdainful, ever-amusing Saint-Denys.

The next day London Society rubbed its eyes in amazement, for that same exquisite, scorning the joys of the season, had left London surreptitiously, accompanied—so 'twas said—only by his faithful servant, Bunch.

The household in Berkeley Square knew nothing of his lordship's whereabouts, nor the likely date of his return.

It was, in truth, a nine days' wonder.

CHAPTER XIII

THREE days later on a dark squally night the English sloop *Friendship* hove to within a mile of Biville cliffs, which are not far from Sarente on the Normandy coast, and distant about a

league from the mouth of the Orne. The skipper gave the order to lower the boat. Two men stood by ready to disembark. They wore dark travelling coats, high boots and hats pulled well down over their eyes; the taller one of the two stood beside the skipper. He was peering through the gloom, striving with all his might to distinguish the rugged line of the cliffs against the stormy sky.

"That's the best I can do for you, sir," the skipper said, as if answering the other's thoughts. "I should risk my ship if I tried to get nearer."

He watched the boat being lowered, and then added: "Now, then, you'll 'ave to look sharp. The coastguards won't be long before they open fire."

While he spoke a violent commotion arose in the stern of the ship: some of the men had apparently started to quarrel, for there was much shouting and swearing both in English and in French.

"What's that?" the tall man asked.

The skipper shrugged. "A tough fellow," he replied, "we found on board when we were mid-channel. You saw 'im, sir, didn't ye?"

"Only vaguely. A man with a beard, eh?"

"That's 'im. 'E's always quarrelling. Frenchman, I believe, though I don't speak 'is lingo. We couldn't very well throw 'im overboard, and 'e made 'isself useful. But now 'e wants to go ashore."

"You won't let him," the other broke in curtly. "I have your promise . . ."

"No fear," the skipper hastened to assure him. "I am a man of my word."

The tall man nodded. He drew a wallet from the wide leather belt which he wore, extracted therefrom two English bank-notes and pressed them into the skipper's hand. The pay was generous. The skipper touched his forelock.

"Thank'ee, sir," he said, then went on, pointing through the gloom in the direction of the coast, "you'll have a tough job before you get to the top."

"The local people, I'm told, get up and down here," the tall man remarked dryly.

"So they do, sir, but not on a night like this, and not at high tide."

The other made no further comment, and presently the skipper called out, "Good luck to you, sir!" and then again, "Good luck!" as the two men lowered themselves into the boat.

"Madmen," was the skipper's curt comment to his mate as the

boat with the two men was quickly swallowed up by the darkness. "I've put lots of 'em ashore on this coast before now, but they was Frenchies. What the hell an English gentleman wants to meddle with 'em for. . . . Hallo!" he exclaimed abruptly, "there's that damned frog-eater again."

Again there was shouting and swearing and sounds of men quarrelling away in the stern. And finally the cry, "Man overboard!"

"What the . . . !"

The mate went to ascertain what was happening. He came back a moment or two later with the tale that the Frenchman had jumped overboard.

The skipper spat, and shrugged to show his indifference.

"I'd just as soon 'e went," he said dryly, "'e was always quarrelling."

Obviously on a night like this a man overboard wouldn't have a dog's chance of life if those in the boat didn't do their best for him. The skipper was doubtful if his two passengers who had paid him so generously would make any attempt at pulling a derelict Frenchman out of the water. They had made a great point that no one else should be allowed to go ashore with them at the Biville cliffs.

The next moment a vivid flash rent the darkness. It came from the summit of the cliffs where a tiny light glimmered outside the coastguard station. The flash was followed a second or two later by a resounding bang, while a cannon ball whistled through the air and buried itself in the sea half a mile wide of the sloop.

"We'd best run," the skipper remarked philosophically. "We've outstayed our welcome." And he gave the order for the sloop to put about for the return journey to England.

CHAPTER XIV

MARTIN LEROY CHARLES SAINT-DENYS, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune in the peerage of the United Kingdom, was plying the oars vigorously. He had thrown down his hat, and the boisterous south-easter tore his brown hair out of its confining ribbon bow, and tossed it about his face. His lordship was ably seconded in his efforts by Mr. Jeremiah Bunch, that paragon among gentlemen's gentlemen. It was pitch-dark, but the light at the coastguard station acted as a beacon. Master and servant had not spoken since his lordship had uttered a curt, "Bad shot!" when the cannon ball fell so wide of the mark.

After the first shot two more followed in quick succession, but the sloop seemingly was out of range and the small boat lost in the darkness. The tide was just on the turn, which made progress terribly hard and slow, and the breakers tossed the boat about like a cockleshell. Thus a few minutes went by, and then suddenly Mr. Bunch called out :

"A man in the water !"

"Impossible !" his lordship retorted. But a moment or two later there could be no doubt about it. Right through the gloom and above the din of surf and wind there rose a cry of distress.

"*Ohé !*" And then again : "*Ohé ! A moi !*"

Saint-Denys responded with a vigorous, "*Ohé !*"

The darkness did indeed make any hope of rescue seem utterly futile, but you cannot catch an Englishman not making the attempt, even at risk of his own life. Thus master and servant made a mighty effort to turn the boat in the direction whence had come the call. They set their teeth, and strove with all their might to keep the boat in the right direction. At intervals they called out loudly, "*Ohé ! ohé !*" but both of them were sure that the drowning man could not possibly see the boat, much less reach it, or even keep his head above water, unless, indeed, he was endowed with unusual strength.

Nevertheless a few minutes later, and just when the oarsmen feared for their own safety's sake to stand by any longer, a hand clutched the edge of the boat, and then a head appeared . . . another hand . . . shoulders . . . and with the aid of Mr. Bunch the drowning man was dragged into the boat, and fell exhausted in the bottom, panting like a fish with a hook in its gill. Obviously he was the stowaway of whom the skipper of the *Friendship* had spoken as being French and quarrelsome, and wanting to be put ashore on this spot. But whether he had jumped overboard or been thrown in by an irate British tar as a result of a quarrel was, of course, impossible to say.

Saint-Denys and Mr. Bunch paid no further heed to him. They had their hands full with trying to keep the boat clear of the rocks. The struggle was resumed between man and the elements, with man hopelessly outclassed. The battle raged furiously. Soon the bottom of the boat struck against a jagged rock. Her breaking up into splinters was but a question of seconds. She had to be abandoned. The two men threw down their oars and kicked the stowaway into consciousness. Saint-Denys was the last to leave the boat.

In Saint-Denys's *Memoirs** published many years later there is a vivid account of that landing at the foot of the Biville cliffs. He tells how he and his two companions scrambled from rock to rock, up to their waists in water, their coats clinging to their legs. The huge breakers came rolling in with thunderous roarings and sighings, and threw them down on hands and knees, threatening every moment to dash them against the rocks, to smash them to pieces as they had done that cockleshell of a boat. However, after much scrambling and climbing he, Martin, obtained a footing on a ledge of rock that was above the reach of the tide. From that point of vantage he was able to give a hand to the majestic Mr. Bunch—so very unmajestic now. The stowaway brought up the rear. Soon the three of them, drenched to the skin, their clothes torn, their boots weighted with water, were able to rest in comparative safety. The first thing they did was to take off their boots and drain them.

"I marvelled," his lordship goes on to relate, "how much more of this scampering over rocky ledges lay before us, and whether we should ever reach the summit of the cliffs alive. It was Monsieur Legros who had advised this landing place, but I was sure that he himself had never come ashore on this God-forsaken spot. With his fat paunch and weak legs friend Legros could never have breasted these demmed rocks. However, he assured me that for the last stage of our difficult ascent we should find a rope-ladder fixed to stout posts on the edge of the cliff above and dangling down the sheer wall of the rock. The local people, he said, used it for reaching the beach at low tide.

"I inquired of the man whom we had rescued from drowning whether he knew of the exact spot where we should find this rope-ladder, but he gave me no answer, whereat I concluded that he was a sailor from this coast, and spoke no French save the Normandy patois.

"I was not then interested in the man: probably I was too weary at the time to be interested in anything save in my own comfort: I remember thinking it curious that the fellow showed such an extraordinary want of gratitude. After all, Bunch and I had saved his life at grave risk of our own: and yet there he sat beside us on that narrow ledge of rock, silent, sullen and obviously self-centred.

"It was too dark to see anything of his face, but when we were

* *Indiscretions* by Martin Leroy, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune, privately printed 1812 and issued by the publishing house of Messrs. Abbots and Company in Ave Maria Lane, London.

abandoning the boat, and I pushed him ashore in front of me, I had caught sight of a shaggy beard and thick, unkempt hair. He had nothing on but a pair of trousers held round his waist by a cord, and I remember at the time thinking that it was as well that he had no arms about him, not even a knife, for of a truth I had seldom been in contact with a man who looked more like a cut-throat than this stowaway.

"I did try, by signs and gestures, to induce him to talk. He must have known that we, too, wished to get to the top of the cliffs, or we would not have chosen to land on this God-forsaken shore. But anyway, as the darkness was intense, it would have been madness to attempt further climbing even with a guide, with the risk at any moment of losing our footing and being hurled to certain death below.

"The only thing to do," Saint-Denys goes on to say, "was to wait till the tide was far enough out to enable us to get down on to the beach, and there make ourselves as comfortable as wind and a bed of shingle would allow. And this we did after a time, just when Bunch and I were getting so cramped and numb that we were ready to tumble off our perch.

"It was easier down on the beach. The worthy Bunch and I sat huddled together in our drenched clothes under the shelter of a convenient rock, waiting for the first glimmer of daylight. All around us the wind howled, and the roar of the breakers did after a time lull us to drowsiness. What our taciturn companion in misfortune was doing, or where he was spending these wearisome hours, I knew not: strangely enough, whenever I heard through the noise of the breakers the dismal cry of a seagull, my thoughts reverted to him. The cry is so like that of a human creature in distress."

CHAPTER XV

It was when the first grey shaft of dawn pierced the black mantle of the night that something furtive roused Saint-Denys out of his torpor. He neither moved nor opened his eyes: an unaccountable instinct told him that the stowaway was standing close by, looking down upon him. But despite weariness and the cold which numbed his limbs, his faculties were on the alert.

"I was ready for the man," he says in his *Memoirs*, "in case he sprang at my throat. How long he stood there I know not, and I have often wondered why I came then and there to the conclusion

that his intentions towards me were evil, and that if he had had a convenient knife about him he would have been ready to murder us in our sleep.

"After a time he moved away, furtively, noiselessly treading the shingle with his naked feet as softly as a cat. I opened my eyes, and still without moving I watched his powerful figure moving with extraordinary agility among the rocks. He had started to climb, and presently I could see him making his way stealthily along the ledge of rock where first we had found shelter.

"After a time I got to my knees, and crawling with the aid of my hands I kept my man well in sight. Obviously he was making for the top of the cliff, and the rope-ladder of which my friend Legros had spoken. I was thankful to be shown the nearest way. But prudence warned me against making my presence known. Somehow I had realised by now that he was no mere surly Normandy peasant, but rather a man who, for some unknown reason, looked upon me as an enemy."

Saint-Denys then goes on to say that he waited for several minutes longer while a pale grey light came slowly creeping up in the east. Then he roused Mr. Bunch, and together the two of them made their way over the rocks, and up the incline over which the stowaway had finally disappeared.

It was a stiff and perilous ascent. Mr. Bunch was neither so young nor so active as his master, and Saint-Denys had the double task of climbing and holding fast himself, whilst seeing to it that poor panting, struggling Mr. Bunch did not miss his footing.

Soon, however, they reached another wide ledge of rock, which was flanked by a sheer wall of granite. At sight of it Saint-Denys gave a feeble cheer, for down this declivity there dangled from above a stout rope-ladder. The ascent up the ladder was painful and difficult, master and servant were very weary. At last, ragged, drenched and aching to the marrow, they tumbled on the summit of the cliff. Their aching eyes surveyed the landscape before them. It was unspeakably desolate. The rocky earth was covered with grass, with here and there small spinneys of stunted trees and rough scrub that shook and sighed in the blast. The sound of the breakers on the flow far away down below came to the ear like muffled thunder. Somewhere in the distance a dog barked, and then a couple of shots rang out.

The stowaway was nowhere to be seen.

It was obviously unsafe to remain in the open. Without a word Saint-Denys pointed to a spinney close by. On hands and knees the two men dragged themselves along the ground, deep in mud,

until they found shelter behind the scrub. They were only just in time. Hardly had they reached this precarious hiding-place when the sound of voices came to their ears: two men speaking in the harsh patois of the province. Weary though he was, Saint-Denys raised himself on his elbow, tried to peep through the scrub and strained his ears to hear.

Whence the men had come he couldn't tell. They came from somewhere inland, and walked up to the edge of the cliff where they came to a halt beside the iron posts to which the rope-ladder was attached: two men, and one of them was the stowaway whom he, Saint-Denys, with his faithful Bunch had saved from drowning at peril of their lives. The wind had dried his hair and was tossing it about his head, so that his face was almost completely hidden. But there was no mistaking the large and powerful bulk, the bare feet and the coarse black beard. His trousers clung sodden to his legs, but he had donned a rough woollen jersey over his massive torso. He and his companion stood for awhile on the very edge of the cliff, peering down the declivity, then one of them took a knife out of his pocket and severed the rope-ladder from its supporting post. It fell down into the abyss. The men watched it fall, after which they walked away.

Saint-Denys's gaze followed them for a few minutes. They were walking away from the sea, and presently the watcher lost sight of them. They disappeared behind an intervening clump of shrubs. Saint-Denys then turned to Mr. Bunch and remarked dryly:

"An unpleasant person, eh, Bunch?"

"Hextremely so, my lord."

"I wonder whether it was for us that he planned this very unpleasant form of death."

"I believe so, my lord."

"You think he wanted us to remain down there until . . . ?"

"I do, my lord."

"Now why should you think that?"

"Hinstinct, my lord, and 'im being French."

"Our allies now, Bunch."

"Frog-eaters, my lord."

"Oh! Go to sleep, Bunch, and dream of angels."

"Yes, my lord."

After which they curled themselves up under the shelter of the scrub, for of a truth they could not have dragged themselves farther, even though this sparse spinney was not much of a screen against wind and weather, nor any protection against lurking

enemies. But their limbs, stiff with cold, refused them service. The morning came in, grey and dismal, while they lay in a huddled heap on the hard ground, oblivious of the world and of the strange mission that had brought them to this inhospitable spot.

Whether Mr. Bunch obeyed his lordship's command and dreamt of angels with his head pillowed on the hard bosom of Mother Earth is doubtful; certain it is that both he and his master did presently fall into a stupor-like sleep from which, after an hour or two, Saint-Denys roused himself and tried to collect his scattered wits. Many things had happened in the past twenty-four hours, mostly disagreeable things, of which the cutting of that rope-ladder by the mysterious stowaway stood out as most unpleasant. No man, however adventurous, however reckless of danger, likes to think that unknown enemies are ready to murder him. Death, yes! at the hand of another, perhaps, but in an open fight, not by the hand of an assassin. Ah, well! good, fat, benevolent Monsieur Legros had warned him, and perhaps it was as well that right at the outset he should realise that here every man's hand would probably be against him, and that as a stranger and an Englishman he was an object of suspicion to both sides: to these ignorant peasants with their blind adoration of the fanatical Cottereau, and to Bonaparte's police for possible sympathies with the Chouans.

However, this was not the time for musing and philosophising; these would have to wait till one was less hungry and less cold. For the nonce, Saint-Denys registered the pious wish that he had allowed that murdering stowaway to drown at the foot of the Biville cliffs. Fully aroused now, he struggled to his feet, gave the huddled Bunch a friendly kick, and then made his way round the spinney into the open.

Despite the mist that hung over the distant hills, the wan daylight revealed most of the surrounding landscape. At a distance of some two hundred yards the road wound its muddy and rutted way from the coastline inland. Far away on the right the square tower of a church and a cluster of irregular roofs broke the rugged skyline of the hills. On the left, close to the road, the white walls of the coastguard station gleamed against the drab-coloured sky. It was indeed a desolate corner of God's earth. There was not a soul in sight.

Saint-Denys pointed to the right. "A village there, Bunch."

"Yes, my lord."

"Presumably an inn."

"Yes, my lord."

"I wonder if they make a good *cassoulette Normande* there."

"Probably, my lord."

"It is made with pieces of goose, Bunch, and pork, also beans. It is most excellent, Bunch."

"I know it, my lord."

"Good! Then we'll see where we can get it."

And master and servant stepped out resolutely in the direction of the distant village.

CHAPTER XVI

THE village consisted of one street with cottages on each side that were little more than hovels. The little church with its white-washed walls, its square tower and low encircling wall was at the bottom of the street. The tops of tombstones in the churchyard peeped in rows above the wall. As master and servant made their way through the village curious glances, not altogether free from hostility and suspicion, followed their progress.

At the end of the street a tavern sign, representing a cat with outstretched legs leaping in mid-air over a hencoop, dangled from a rickety post. It proclaimed to the weary traveller that the house close by was none other than the tavern of *Le Chat qui Saute*. It stood a little way back from the road and isolated from the neighbouring cottages. In the rear was a tall wooden paling, a few stunted acacias and one or two thatched barns. In the front it boasted of a porch.

With a sigh of satisfaction Saint-Denys turned into the porch, and here came face to face with a man—obviously the landlord—who seemed half inclined to bar the way.

"My friend and I can get food and a bed here, *n'est ce pas?*" he asked. Then, as the man appeared to look him suspiciously up and down, he hastened to add: "We'll pay for what we have."

Obviously the man hesitated; he gave a kind of grunt and glanced uneasily over his shoulder. Saint-Denys, with Mr. Bunch close behind, took the opportunity of pushing past him and entering the common room. The room was empty. It was low and dark and airless, not very inviting, but a cheerful fire blazed in the hearth and a savoury smell came from a large iron pot which simmered above the fire. The landlord followed close on their heels. Saint-Denys affected not to notice his surly, suspicious looks, and cheerfully demanded food. In response to a call from the man, a woman came in and the two of them exchanged a few

words in their patois which Saint-Denys would have given much to understand.

Fortunately the result of this brief confabulation was that the woman, without another word, placed a couple of pewter plates, mugs and spoons on the table, and proceeded to ladle out what proved to be a most excellent *cassoulette*. Master and servant fell to with a will and an excellent appetite, but all the while they kept a sharp look-out both on their hosts and on their surroundings. The landlord hovered about the room, and from time to time seemed intent on looking the strangers up and down.

When they had eaten and drunk their fill, Saint-Denys said lightly: "Now for a room and a bed, my friend."

Of course he knew what the answer would be, and it came out pat: "I have no room."

"House full, eh?" Saint-Denys retorted cheerfully. "Many guests?"

"I have no room," the man muttered with an oath under his breath.

"But this is a tavern, is it not?" Saint-Denys persisted, still quite pleasantly.

"Yes, it is."

"Well, then?"

This time the man made no reply, only went on muttering something in his unintelligible patois. Saint-Denys paused a moment in reflection, then he said with a sigh of affected weariness: "Well, we shall have to push on to the next village, I suppose. Is it far?"

"Two leagues."

"We can hire horses, I suppose?"

"No, you can't. There are no horses in these parts."

"No horses? Impossible! How can that be?"

"They've all been requisitioned for the army."

"Bonaparte's army?"

The landlord cast a quick glance of suspicion on the two men, and then reiterated curtly: "The army."

"Ah!" His lordship exclaimed with well-feigned carelessness, "the usurper is no more a friend of yours than he is of ours. In England, you know, we frighten children with Boney's name."

"But you have made peace with him."

"Governments make peace and war, my friend, not the people."

"You are right there, sir."

Clearly both the man and his wife were impressed by the fact that the visitors were English. It had probably not struck them

before, as his lordship spoke perfect French. Already the man's manner had undergone a change, his voice was less gruff, his glance less hostile. The woman drew nearer to have a closer look at these two Englishmen.

"So you are English, sir?" the man said presently.

"Why yes, my friend. Your question flatters me. My mother," Saint-Denys went on as if impelled by a sudden desire for expansiveness, "my mother was French. She taught me the language in my cradle." He paused, then added lightly: "She was a Moreau de Montherlant."

This had the advantage of being true, and it produced something of the desired effect. Saint-Denys, with half an eye, could see the landlord give a nudge to his wife. He waited in silence for a moment or two, then made as if to rise. "Ah, well," he sighed, "I suppose we shall have to trudge a couple more leagues on foot."

"There is no hurry," the landlord said hastily, "you can rest here awhile, and perhaps . . ."

He paused, for suddenly from some way up the street there came the melancholy hoot of an owl.

"I would have taken no notice of this," his lordship relates in his "Indiscretions". "What more natural than that owls should dwell in these lonely out-of-the-way places? It was the landlord's changed expression of face that seemed all at once to key up every nerve in my body. Was not the hoot of the screech-owl the rallying cry of Cottereau and his horde? In a moment my thoughts flashed back to the incident I had witnessed on the cliffs in a kind of half-dream, an incident which, as a matter of fact, I had half forgotten—the rope-ladder cut and falling down the abyss, and the stowaway whom we had pulled out of the water watching the ladder fall.

"The next moment the door of the common room was thrown open, and a man walked in. I suppose there is an instinct in man, just as there is in every animal, which warns him of the presence of an enemy. The moment that shaggy-bearded man—the stowaway from England—came into the room I had the absolute conviction that he was none other than Jacques Cottereau. I only marvelled that I had not guessed this before. The room being dark he did not immediately perceive us. His clothes still looked dank and muddy, and his hair fell all over his face. With an impatient gesture he brushed it off his forehead. Just then the landlord said something to him in their abominable patois, and he turned and looked at me first, and then at Bunch. I had seldom met, I must admit, a more sinister look.

"Whether he recognised us or not, I could not say. The night had been very dark, and we had had no occasion to peer into one another's faces. But Cottereau's glowering eyes did not look as if they ever missed much. Be that as it may, however, his face betrayed nothing of his thoughts. His eyes remained sinister and hostile, but otherwise showed no sign of recognition or surprise.

"But the moment I saw him enter the room I made up my mind that I would not be driven out of this village by any surly landlord. Here I had mine enemy under my eye, and at any moment a chance word dropped here or there might guide me in my mission. With that object in view I set myself the task of further allaying the landlord's suspicion, and perhaps lulling the irascible Cottereau into indifference towards my insignificant person. I called loudly for more cider, and drank quite a good deal of the abominable stuff. I also yawned audibly from time to time. My worthy Bunch, whose whole existence seems to consist in guessing and forestalling my thoughts, had already spread his arms over the table and buried his head in the crook of his elbow. The next moment he was snoring audibly.

"I then began to talk at random, as if anxious to take the landlord into my confidence over all my private affairs: I told him about my service in the army against Bonaparte; my inveterate ill-luck at cards; my ruined prospects; my connection with France, and especially Picardy, through my mother who was a Moreau of Montherlant, one of the most honoured names in the old *noblesse* of France. I talked loudly and thickly like one who has had too much to drink, and gradually I could see the landlord unbend quite a good deal. Obviously he was beginning to look upon me as the usual type of mad Englishman, and I amused him with my tales about 'Boney.'

"I nearly fell off the bench. I banged poor Mr. Bunch on the back. I poked the landlord in the ribs. I was more drunk than any real drunkard could ever be."

Thus does his lordship record the incidents of his first evening at *Le Chat qui Saute*. Cottereau the while sat silent and stolid at the other end of the table, munching the food and drinking the cider which the woman had placed before him. Saint-Denys began singing a song in English—"Home, Sweet Home"—in a high falsetto, accompanying himself by thumping the palm of his hand upon the table. He never once lost sight of Cottereau. While he enacted his scene half a dozen men had come straggling into the common room. Some of them had a drink, others only sat about on benches or on the edge of the table. All of them kept

their eyes fixed on this noisy stranger. One and all had begun by casting suspicious glances on him, but presently most of them appeared reassured. Some laughed at his antics or shrugged with obvious unconcern.

Then after a while Saint-Denys, tired of his rôle, emulated the example set by Mr. Bunch. He sprawled across the table and presently appeared to be sound asleep. He kept his ears open, however. Strained them to hear every sound. The men had ceased to take any notice of him. They gathered round the hearth and talked. Unfortunately they used their patois all the time and Saint-Denys could not understand a single word. He took the opportunity of collecting his own thoughts. How was he going to find Monseigneur le Duc de Berry, whom he did not know by sight? How was he to make any inquiries without once again rousing suspicions which might at any time prove fatal to his mission? He had certainly had one bit of luck even at the outset of his adventure. He had within the first few hours "established contact with the enemy." He was actually sitting in the same room with him. And is it not the essence of a successful campaign to *know* one's enemy?

Thus reflecting, planning, sleeping, several hours sped by, morning sank into afternoon, and still the problem remained unsolved of how to force a surly and suspicious landlord to give him and Bunch shelter at least for one night.

And on the old principle that *le bon Dieu* helps those who help themselves, luck came to him in the shape of a tremendous storm. A regular downpour, with gale blowing at seventy miles an hour. In five minutes the road was flooded, and ruts ran with yellow mud. Saint-Denys, like one just awakened from heavy sleep, blinked his eyes and gazed with a bleary look on the small window panes blurred with running water. Stretched himself and yawned. . . . Shook himself like a dog after a swim. Finally he rose and strode to the window and remained there for a minute or so, legs outspread, hands on hips, as if gazing disconsolately on the mischief wrought by this abominable weather.

The shades of evening were beginning to draw in, but the men still sat round the hearth, doing nothing. Cottereau and the landlord were muttering together in one corner of the room.

At one moment Saint-Denys glanced over his shoulder and caught the landlord's eye.

"Now, what about a bed for to-night, my friend?" he remarked. "You couldn't turn a dog out in this weather."

The landlord seemed to throw a questioning glance at Cottereau, who gave a careless shrug.

"Do as you like, Grand Charles," he said, in French this time, and then returned to the hearth. Things were looking more promising, thought the gay adventurer.

"Suppose you give us some supper in the meanwhile, friend Grand Charles," his lordship went on glibly, "and then we'll see."

He went up to Bunch and shook him vigorously by the shoulder. "Hey, my friend!" he called, "wake up! Supper! My friend here," he added glibly, "is the sleepest man you ever saw in all your life. He sleeps and eats and eats and sleeps and is good for nothing on earth."

He sat down at the table and the woman placed the remains of the *cassoulette* before him.

"Eat, Bunch!" his lordship commanded in English. "I can't swallow another morsel!" And Mr. Bunch obediently ate all he could.

Neither Cottereau nor any of the others took further notice of either of them.

CHAPTER XVII

AFTER the meal, after more drinking and talking, Saint-Denys rose. The storm had now abated, but it was still raining and outside it was pitch dark. Most of the men had gone by now, only Cottereau remained with one of his intimates.

Saint-Denys took the landlord by the arm.

"Conduct us to our room, my friend," he said jocosely.

The landlord evidently had his orders, for he made no demur. Probably, too, he felt that the grip on his arm could not easily be resisted. He picked up a lanthorn in which burned a tiny rush-light, and then led the way out of the common room down a narrow passage and up a flight of stairs. Mr. Bunch followed as a matter of course. On the landing Grand Charles turned in the direction of another flight of stairs, vaguely discernible in the gloom. It looked little better than a ladder, and obviously led to a loft.

"I am not going up there, my friend," Saint-Denys made haste to declare.

"The only bed I have," Grand Charles retorted with a return to his sullen manner.

By the way of further argument Saint-Denys pointed to two doors which gave on the landing.

"Those rooms are occupied," Grand Charles said curtly.

"One of them, yes," his lordship rejoined, for in truth his sharp ears had perceived the sound of a man's voice rising and falling and pausing as if engaged in dictating a letter. "But there's another."

He dragged the unwilling landlord along to the second door, which was ajar, and pushed it open with his foot. The feeble light of the lanthorn revealed a large canopied bedstead, chairs, a table, a ragged bit of stuff on the floor, another in front of the window, all very old and shabby, but obviously a guest-room . . . and unoccupied.

"We'll sleep here, my friend and I," Saint-Denys declared; and to emphasise his words he proceeded to take his coat off, whilst Mr. Bunch flew to his lordship's side ready to wait upon him.

Grand Charles swore by devils and dogs that he would do nothing of the sort.

"Why not?" Saint-Denys asked dryly.

"The room is let."

"To whom?"

"To whom? To whom? That's none of your business."

"Then I shall sleep here," Saint-Denys once again declared, sat down and held out his leg to Mr. Bunch, who knelt down, preparatory to taking off his lordship's boots.

And then a strange thing happened. Saint-Denys was sitting down with one leg outstretched, Mr. Bunch kneeling in front of him, when Grand Charles suddenly stalked across to a dark corner of the room, and then returned with a musket in his hand.

"Now then," he said roughly. "Will you clear out of this room . . . or . . ."

"So that's it, is it? You confounded——" Saint-Denys ejaculated, and in an instant was on his feet. So was Mr. Bunch. A short—a very short—altercation followed, during which Grand Charles, who had a stentorian voice, shouted, "*A moi!*" but already the musket had been wrenched out of his grasp and Saint-Denys was giving it to Mr. Bunch to hold, when the whole situation was suddenly transformed, and in a manner passing strange, for a woman's voice—cold and peremptory—the voice of one accustomed to command, broke in suddenly:

"What is this, Grand Charles? What does it all mean?"

And Grand Charles quickly turned on his heel, lost all his arrogance and seemed to melt into the darkness, while he murmured, "Madame la Marquise. . . ."

A woman, tall, stiff, upright as a pine tree, stood in the doorway. She was dressed in unrelieved black, and over her grey hair she wore a scarf of black lace. Her face was entirely colourless,

and so thin and bony that it looked like a skull with parchment drawn tightly over it. But it was not on this imposing apparition that Martin Saint-Denys's eyes were fixed—fixed so steadily that he himself remained motionless, looking over the shoulder of Madame la Marquise on the most arresting face he had ever seen in all his life. A perfect oval with low, straight brow crowned by an aureole of golden hair, with eyes of a blue as deep as the midnight sky in June, and red, tender mouth, slightly drooping at the corners, which gave the young face an expression of unconquerable sorrow.

Now Saint-Denys had all his life been a worshipper of beauty; never had he been able to resist the appeal of a woman's eyes if those eyes expressed distress or a call for protection, and in those eyes of a midnight blue he seemed to read a pathetic helplessness, a subservience to fate or circumstance, as in a child that is not happy. That was it! That lovely face was the face of an unhappy child. And is there anything in the world more pathetic than an unhappy child?—anything that calls forth more insistently, every instinct of chivalry and self-sacrifice in a high-minded man?

Small wonder, then, that Saint-Denys took but little note of the coldly appraising look with which Madame la Marquise regarded him. He even forgot his manners, a thing no English gentleman was ever known to do, for, in truth he should before now have bowed before the ladies, instead of standing there like an automaton, just worshipping the beauty of that face. It was only when Madame's harsh, dictatorial voice once more reached his consciousness that he remembered the dictates of courtesy.

Madame's eyes, which were stern and singularly haughty, had rested for a moment with a supercilious glance upon him; then she turned to the obsequious landlord.

"Who is this person?" she asked coldly.

"My name is Saint-Denys," Martin broke in with a formal bow.

"Lord Saint-Denys at Madame's service."

"Ah!" Madame remarked. "English?"

"At your service."

"Yet you speak French like a native."

"You are too gracious, madame."

"And . . . you are visiting France, milor? . . ."

"For pleasure, Madame la Marquise."

"Ah, yes! You English have now made peace with Bonaparte."

"With France, yes, madame."

She did not take up his challenge, but her face appeared even harder than before.

"And you feel," she resumed, with a note of sarcasm in her hard voice, "that it is safe now for English gentlemen to visit France . . . for pleasure?"

Saint-Denys gave a slight shrug.

"I don't know about safe, Madame la Marquise," he said with a smile.

"Safe for the allies of Bonaparte, at any rate," she retorted dryly. "I hope, therefore, milor, that you will find pleasure in your visit to France."

She gave a slight nod as would a queen to a courtier whom she dismissed, and sailed past him into the room.

"Come, Félice," she said. And then, "Good night, milor."

So her name was Félice! Saint-Denys watched her as she glided past him like a beautiful wraith, her dress, which was grey in colour—at least, so it appeared to Martin—made a soft swishing sound against the floor.

As he would in a dream, Saint-Denys found himself once more upon the landing with a door between him and the most beautiful woman he had ever seen in his life. He had heard it fall to with a loud bang, had even heard the sound of a key turned in the lock, so what did anything matter now? For the moment even the future King of France and his own mission appeared futile and insignificant now that he could no longer feast his eyes on Félice.

The woman, obviously the wife of Grand Charles, had lighted the ladies upstairs. She looked a fat, stolid creature as she stood now beside her husband at the head of the stairs as if to guard it and the rest of her house against further intrusion. She had a lanthorn in her hand. Grand Charles took it from her and once more turned in the direction of the rickety stairs. Martin followed him this time without protest. He still felt himself to be in a kind of ecstatic dream, and he would have walked blindly into a death-trap or through hell's own portals so long as these dream-places happened to be under the same roof that sheltered Félice.

Grand Charles's manner had become more deferential. Apparently he was much impressed by the fact that Madame la Marquise had deigned to converse with this English traveller. Swinging his lanthorn, he went to the length of standing meekly at the head of the stairs, while Saint-Denys and Bunch were slowly mounting. He pushed open a door, and while milor passed through he was profuse in his apologies for the poverty of the accommodation.

Indeed, it could not have been much poorer. The place was no better than a loft, with worm-eaten rafters overhead, creaking boards underfoot and one small window under the sloping roof.

It was obviously a place used for the storage of all manner of things. Sacks of dried beans, strings of onions, trusses of hay and straw encumbered the best part of it. The window was obviously impracticable, less than two feet square, its tiny panes opaque with grime. The smell was foul in the extreme, and as Grand Charles entered the place with his lanthorn a couple of rats scrambled away into the gloom. At one end of the loft there was a narrow truckle bed; on it a palliasse and bolster, out of which wisps of straw protruded, and a horse-blanket which should never have left the stables. A broken-down chair leaned forlorn against the wall; Grand Charles deposited the lanthorn on it.

"It is the only bed I have, I swear it!" he murmured.

Mr. Bunch, majestic and imperturbable, his hands folded in front of him, stood by the door waiting to know what his lordship would wish to do. But his lordship only shrugged and, without giving as much as a look round, strode into this awful barn. What did anything matter so long as the same roof sheltered him and Félice?

But if looks could kill, Grand Charles, instead of striding complacently down the stairs, would of a certainty at this moment be lying dead at Mr. Bunch's feet.

CHAPTER XVIII

To think of sleep was, of course, out of the question. Saint-Denys had taken off his coat and rolled it up to make a pillow for his head, then he lay down all but fully dressed on the creaking truckle bed, actually thankful that sleep would never come to him this night of all nights, when his one desire was to think and dream of Félice.

And 'twixt dreaming and waking, waking and dreaming, the dark hours of the night slipped away on the wings of time. Somewhere in the old tumble-down house a bracket-clock ticked so loudly that the sound penetrated through to the loft; and from the near distance, too, there came at regular intervals the booming of the church clock striking the hours. But so absorbed was Martin Saint-Denys in his thoughts that he hardly even heard these consciously.

What did darkness matter, or rats, or the rancid smell of decaying cereals, when these long hours of the night happened to be peopled with visions of Félice, silent and sad, Félice, happy and smiling, Félice, always Félice!

Had he fallen in love, as does a schoolboy, at sight of the first pretty woman he meets? Certainly not! Dreaming and waking, Saint-Denys was quite sure that he was not in love. He knew all about love. Had he not made love to countless numbers of beautiful women in his time? No; it was his sense of beauty that was wholly satisfied whenever his mind conjured up the vision of that girl with the midnight-blue eyes that recalled a midsummer's night, and hair like ripe corn. It was nothing more than the satisfaction of his æsthetic sense—nothing more.

Who should think of blaming a young adventurer if during those waking hours he entirely forgot the good Monsieur Legros and the Duc de Berry, and if in his brain his quest of the future King of France got inextricably mixed with his determination to seek Félise?

Mr. Bunch, as befits the perfect gentleman's gentleman, spent an equally restless night—not because he was haunted by any visions of beauty, but because knowing that his lordship was awake it behoved him, Bunch, to be awake also. He had taken the precaution of spreading some hay across the threshold of this rat-infested hole, and it was on this extempore bed that he tossed about restlessly, while the hours of the night crept on, leaden-footed.

Thus, unlike his master, Mr. Bunch not being troubled with dreams was aware not only of rats, but also of comings and goings both inside the *cabaret* and outside on the road. To these sounds this paragon among men lent an attentive ear in case his lordship desired information on the subject when he had finished dreaming. Indeed, at one time Bunch did make an attempt to ascertain what was going on outside; the lanthorn did still at the time throw a feeble light upon the floor; in his stocking-feet, as noiselessly as he could, he made his way over to the small window under the roof. But the night was pitch-black and the tiny panes thick with grime, so he could see nothing in the road. Whereupon he tiptoed back to his uncomfortable couch.

After an hour or so the noises subsided and the night became very still. Then the lanthorn flickered out and died. Mr. Bunch could no longer see his master, but for a time he still heard him tossing about, and breathing with significant irregularity. Presently, however, that breathing became more measured and also more heavy. Mr. Bunch felt justified in supposing that his master had fallen into a more or less troubled sleep; whereupon he granted himself the luxury of trying also to woo the elusive goddess; he turned over on his side and remembered nothing more.

Towards morning, in that dark hour which precedes the dawn,

both master and servant were conscious of having been awakened suddenly by some unaccountable sound.

His lordship sat up in bed.

"Did you hear that, Bunch?"

"Yes, my lord."

"What was it?"

"Couldn't say, my lord."

Already both men were on their feet.

"Can you see through the window?" his lordship asked. "There is a light now; there wasn't one before."

Mr. Bunch, using his coat-sleeve for the purpose, tried to wipe some of the grime off the window-panes. He glued his face to them.

"Can you see anything?" his lordship asked.

"A coach, my lord, in the road, and that rascally landlord with a stable lantern, going in and out of the house."

Saint-Denys in his turn glued his face to the window. Both he and Bunch moved about as noiselessly as the creaking boards and the darkness would allow.

A coach and four was standing in the road. The light came from the two carriage lanterns. The coachman was on the box with the reins in his hands; someone was standing at the horses' heads, but who that was Saint-Denys could not distinguish. From below there came the soft murmur of voices. After a moment or two Grand Charles came out of the house and went to open the carriage door. Immediately afterwards Madame la Marquise came, and with her a short man wearing a hat and a travelling coat. Saint-Denys, looking down on the scene from above, could only see the top of his hat and the capes of his coat. The next moment, however, everything else became faded and blurred, for Félice had come out of the house and walked to the coach in the wake of her mother.

She had on a dark hood over her dress—a cloak with a hood, but she had thrown back the hood and the night breeze played about her fair hair. Saint-Denys could not see her face. He felt that he would gladly give ten years of his life for a sight of her eyes and of her mouth.

It was strange that the man in the travelling coat should get into the coach in front of the ladies, but this he certainly did. Madame la Marquise, before following him, stood for a few moments by the carriage door, apparently in order to give certain orders to Grand Charles, who—so it seemed to Saint-Denys—cast a furtive glance up at the loft and then bowed obsequiously. At

the same time the man who had been standing at the horses' heads came out of the gloom. It was Cottereau. He, too, appeared to give orders to the landlord, to which the latter listened with as much deference as he had done to those of Madame la Marquise. He put up his hand and nodded his head as if to assure them both that they would be strictly obeyed.

All this time Félice had remained standing beside her mother, with the wind playing with her fair hair and her pale hand holding on to her cloak. And all of a sudden Saint-Denys realised that she was going away and that if she did he might not see her for many days, perhaps, or weeks, until he found her again.

Not see her face again? . . . It was unthinkable! In a trice he had turned from the window and stumbled in the darkness as far as the door. He fumbled with it until he found the heavy iron handle. He turned it and pulled. To no purpose! The door was bolted on the outside. He threw his weight against it. The wood creaked, but the door resisted. Bunch, that paragon, also threw his weight against the door, but it was bolted on the outside with what must be a solid transverse bar of iron, and the wood was solid oak. Nothing but a crow-bar or a joist would be of the slightest use. Lord Saint-Denys and his servant Bunch were prisoners in the old loft.

To say that his lordship swore would, perhaps, be putting it rather mildly. What Mr. Bunch thought—for he was too great a gentleman to put his thoughts into words—cannot here be recorded.

But if his lordship's wrath was violent, it was of brief duration—at any rate, outwardly. His was the temperament of the true adventurer, who knows just when to accept the inevitable. He went back to the window and, peering out, saw the coach disappear down the road into the darkness and heard the rumble of the wheels that were bearing Félice away into the unknown. He remained for a moment quite still, as if transfixed with the magnitude of this calamity. But immediately afterwards his wrath—the kind of wrath that could be put into words—fell away from him. A great calm descended upon him and his brain felt peculiarly lucid. He revisualised the picture he had just seen: the coach and four, and the man in the caped coat who stepped into the coach in front of the ladies. That was the Duc de Berry. Of course it was. Everything pointed to that fact. Everything. The deference shown to him by the proud Marquise; the mystery with which his departure in the early dawn was surrounded, even Cottereau doing him service by standing at the horses' heads: all

these went to prove that the man whom Martin Saint-Denys had pledged his honour to find had slept under this roof, and then driven away. Whither? Never had Saint-Denys felt his nerves more thoroughly keyed up than at this moment, never had he felt his brain more lucid. Indeed, he felt like a mathematician piecing together the different problems of an arithmetical whole.

The Duc de Berry had driven away in the company of Mme. la Marquise, and Mme. la Marquise was the mother of Félice. He, Martin Saint-Denys, had pledged his word that he would find the Duc de Berry and place in his hands certain papers which now reposed in a leather wallet inside his belt, and nothing in the world could deter him from this purpose, not even if he were destined never to set eyes on Félice again. But Fate this time had been over-kind to this prince of gamblers, who had ever been ready to stake life and fortune on any hazard that came his way—who had staked often and nearly always lost. For if the Duc de Berry was in the company of Mme. la Marquise, then to find him would also mean finding Félice. These two vital quests were now merged in one, and Martin could thank God on his knees for that. He was not in love. By George, no! But one thing was certain: as soon as he had redeemed the pledge he gave to M. Legros he would spend every other moment of his life in the service of Félice; he would look closely into those eyes that were like the midnight sky in June, and he would make those lovely drooping lips curl up in a smile.

Mr. Bunch, in the meanwhile, had returned to the discomfort of his couch of hay and tried to go to sleep; but whenever he ventured to open an eye he always saw his lordship sitting on the edge of the truckle-bed with his chin cupped in his hand.

It was only this perfect gentleman's gentleman who heard the bolt outside the door of the loft being almost noiselessly drawn, and when he finally went to sleep it was with the knowledge that his lordship and himself were no longer prisoners in this evil-smelling hole.

CHAPTER XIX

WHEN the boat had foundered on the rocks the small case which contained the few necessities which Mr. Bunch had put together for his master's comfort had been swept into the sea. His lordship now had nothing but the clothes he stood up in—clothes and boots saturated in sea-water. But Mr. Bunch, being an old

campaigner, had dried and cleaned these as best he could, and fortunately the leather belt which held my lord's papers and money was intact.

The rascally landlord, who certainly appeared mollified since Madame la Marquise had deigned to converse with the English traveller, and also since he had tasted some English money, mustered up a razor, with which Bunch was able to shave his lordship on the following morning. Grand Charles himself had a shaven face which Mr. Bunch had not deigned to notice the previous day. He, Bunch, had been ordered by my lord to display the greatest affability to everyone at the inn, and this he did, with a grin on his face that would have scared a nervous cow, and with the use of the French words which he had picked up during the last campaign in France, but as these were swear-words for the most part such as "*Nom d'un chien*" and "*Sacré tonnerre*," they were apt to mitigate his expression of amiability.

But what Mr. Bunch completely failed to understand was his lordship's attitude towards the rascally landlord. He accepted the room which Grand Charles offered him with the assurance that since Madame la Marquise no longer required it milor could occupy it as long as he chose if he was willing to pay for it. Indeed, nothing now could be more amiable, more obsequious even than Grand Charles's attitude toward the English milor. But it was that very servility that gave Saint-Denys most furiously to think. Evidently with the departure of the Duc de Berry all interest in and suspicion of him had been set aside. Cottereau had gone and the centre of interest had shifted to other quarters, the château of Madame la Marquise probably, and it was Saint-Denys's business now to find where those other quarters were.

He tried discreetly to question Grand Charles, but the latter proved as crafty now as he had been suspicious before. He carried blandness and shuffling to the level of a fine art. He began by denying the identity of Madame la Marquise. He declared that milor had misunderstood. The lady, he explained, who had spent that one night at the *Chat qui Saute* was Madame de Laval. She had been on her way to her house at Falaise, distant eight leagues from this village. It was her son and daughter who had driven away with her in the early morning. Milor misunderstood if he thought that he, Grand Charles, had addressed Madame de Laval as Madame la Marquise.

All lies, of course, and Saint-Denys asked no further questions in that direction, didn't even attempt to ask why Jacques Cottereau happened to have driven off with the Laval family. He

would only have had to listen to more lies. Grand Charles had his orders, and evidently had no other thought but to obey.

"I demanded horses," Lord Saint-Denys further relates in his Memoirs, "explaining that I desired to ride as far as Caen and thence take the stage coach to Alençon, but my friend the landlord only shrugged and vowed that there was not a horse to be had for leagues around. They had all been requisitioned for the army. Another lie! I tried bribery, but for once the cupidity of the peasant was proof against temptation. Obviously, then, we were not to be allowed to wander away out of sight.

"So we took to the road on foot, my faithful Bunch and I. Together we combed the countryside till there was not a village within a radius of fifty miles and more that we had not visited. For fifteen days on end, while the equinoctial gales tore over this wind-swept coast and rain and sleet drenched us to the skin, we tramped the muddy roads. O' nights we slept at times in dirty hovels or rat-infested holes. Nowhere were we made welcome. The word had gone round in a swift and mysterious way that we were objects of suspicion. Had we been armed we should not have minded our position nearly so much, but though we had our pistols which Bunch had cleaned and polished after their immersion in the sea, we had been quite unable to purchase powder and shot.

"Wherever possible we made discreet inquiries after the château of La Villorée which Monsieur Legros had instanced to me as the property of one of his intimates where the Duc de Berry might seek hospitality, also after 'Madame la Marquise,' to whose château we claimed to be bound. But all our inquiries were met with sullen reserve and the curt declaration that there was no Madame la Marquise living in this neighbourhood at all, nor was there such a place as La Villorée in the whole of Normandy. As for horses, they appeared to be as extinct as the dodo. There could not be any doubt in my mind that the whole neighbourhood was under the command of Cottereau and had learned its lesson well; and as time went on I became equally convinced that Cottereau suspected something of my purpose and had already made up his mind to rid himself of my unwelcome presence in these parts. His suspicions had probably already found birth in England, and no doubt he had boarded the *Friendship* on purpose to keep on my tracks.

"This meant that in this lively adventure I would carry my life in my hands. Jacques Cottereau was not one to allow any man who thwarted his plans to slip through his fingers unscathed—if

at all. Well, this stronger spice of danger made our enterprise all the more exhilarating, and I knew that in this good old Bunch thought as I did."

Thus undismayed and still sanguine the two adventurers continued their quest. But day after day they drew a blank. In the evenings weary and footsore they retired to some uncomfortable beds, grudgingly allotted to them in an inhospitable *cabaret*.

They would usually turn into one of these *cabarets* by night-fall, and oft-times find the common room filled with a rough crowd of men who sat or stood about eating cheese and drinking cider. From a distance they would hear the harsh voices speaking the Normandy patois, but as soon as they pushed open the door conversations would at once cease, and they were met by the glowering looks to which they had become accustomed. After a time the crowd would disperse, some of the men bidding them a grudging good night.

Then one day master and servant wandered farther afield than usual. A chance word dropped in a village market square suggested a possible clue. There was a château seemingly farther on, on the side of the Collines, and it was called La Villorée. The chance words that were dropped by a man who appeared to be the village idiot were: "Madame la Marquise is not there now."

The man had quickly been silenced by a vigorous cuff from a neighbour, and not another word could be elicited from him or anyone else after that, but while he spoke he had pointed in a certain direction—at least so it appeared—and the two adventurers turned that way and tramped on for an hour before they came to the conclusion that they had been misled. Purposely, perhaps. Anyway, there was no château in sight, and the few inquiries which they made brought no satisfactory reply. Night in the meanwhile—a dark moonless night—had drawn in: they had tramped over four leagues since morning, and were no longer sure of finding their way back to their temporary quarters in the dark. Saint-Denys was just hesitating what to do when, to his great relief, he spied a cluster of lights a mile or so ahead.

The two men tramped on more cheerfully and, to their great joy, they presently found themselves on the confines of a small township of the usual pattern: a winding street, a few ill-paved lanes, and a market-place with a church and, most welcome of all, a post with a light on it and a sign bearing the legend *Cabaret du Cheval Noir*.

"And here we enter, Bunch, and get supper and a bed!" his lordship said gaily.

The *cabaret* proved to be a more cheerful place than those they had come across hitherto, although it was just as stuffy and as noisy, reeked of hot food, wine and perspiring humanity. But in the common room, instead of the usual crowd of rough peasantry, there were a number of men in the blue uniform of Bonaparte's mounted police. There were bottles of wine on the table, a very unusual thing these days in this cider-producing province. Girls went to and fro in and out of the room, carrying jugs and mugs and dishes of steaming stew. Everybody here appeared lively, and there reigned an altogether different atmosphere to the open hostility with which the English travellers had become familiar.

"Nor," his lordship tells us, "did we excite unusual interest when we entered. It was easy enough to guess that here was a part of a squadron of *gendarmerie*, presumably stationed in this small town, and I did not see any reason why an English gentleman, travelling for his pleasure and accompanied by his servant, should not enter the place openly and be made welcome. Taking off my hat I made a sweeping bow to the company present, and announced ourselves as 'English travellers!' adding cheerfully, 'desiring supper and bed.'

"I ordered supper for myself and Bunch. Being hungry and chilled I ate and drank heartily, after which, feigning scanty knowledge of the French language, I entered into conversation with some of the soldiers. There was no sign here of suspicion or secretiveness. Indeed, I may say that within half an hour I learned more from our late enemy's gendarmes than ever I did from Cottereau's surly followers. Among other things I learned that the *château de la Villorée* was close by, and that it was the property of Monsieur le Marquis de Marillac, an *émigré* who had served with the allied armies against Bonaparte and was now in England. How I kept my countenance straight when the name Marillac first struck on my ear I cannot say. Never in my life was I so near betraying an overwhelming joy. At last I knew the name of the most beautiful woman on earth. Her mother had called her *Félice*: her father owned La Villorée and was the de Marillac of whom Monsieur Legros had spoken. *Félice de Marillac* was the name of the most beautiful woman on earth, the lovely being whom her father so aptly spoke of as his 'flower.' *Ma fleur!* Everything that fat Monsieur Legros told me on that fateful night in Berkeley Square came back to me as in a flash. Not only was *Félice de Marillac* the one woman on earth whose beauty I could worship, but she was one being in this hostile country who was not under the influence of mine enemy Cottereau, the one person among

this crowd of suspicious fanatics whom I was allowed to trust, and to whom I might reveal the secret of my mission!

"In very truth I did my best to keep calm, for the soldiers partly talking directly with me and partly among themselves did also inform me that Madame la Marquise lived on at the château with her son and daughter, that the family was under suspicion for aiding the local Chouans in their brigandage, in consequence of which a close watch was being kept on them, as it was generally supposed that some of the Capet family did at times come surreptitiously over from England to pay them a visit. Now we in England all knew that '*Capet*' was the insulting name originally bestowed on the unfortunate Royal family of France by the revolutionaries; apparently it was still used in connection with them. Feigning ignorance I inquired who were the *Capets*, and which member of that family was expected to pay a visit to this neighbourhood, whereupon I was informed that it was the next pretender to the throne of France, whose name was the Duc de Berry. There was much laughter over this, the idea that there could ever be such a thing again as a King of France causing a great deal of hilarity.

" 'With nothing but a lot of brigands,' one man said, 'to do their fighting for them.'

"Others, however, took the matter more seriously.

" 'No good despising one's enemy, I say,' one of them, who had a corporal's stripe on his sleeve said sententiously.

" 'And that man Cottereau is the very devil,' declared another.

" 'Why, only three days ago he and some of his gang broke into the house of Monsieur the receiver of taxes here in this very town, and got away with three hundred *écus* of public money.'

" 'Yes, and the very next night . . .'

"And there followed an endless succession of tales of the evil-doings of Cottereau and his horde. According to the company here present he was a man possessed of the devil and endowed with supernatural strength and cunning.

" 'Here one day and gone the next, my friend,' the corporal declared. 'You never know how to get him or where those ruffians have their hiding-places. Many a time have some of us traced him to that den of thieves, the *Cabaret du Pélican*, over at Soulanges, and no sooner did we get there than lo! he disappeared, he and the lot of them as if the earth had swallowed them up.'

" 'My belief is,' went on another, 'that that is just what the earth did do. Swallowed them all up. And that it was the devil himself who dug the hole for them.'

"The next half-hour was taken up with varying comments on the personalities of the neighbourhood. I gathered that this squadron of *gendarmerie* had been dispatched to this district to reinforce the garrison for the purpose of rounding up some of those vagabond Chouans whose depredations and bare-faced robberies had tired the patience of the government up in Paris, also for the purpose of keeping an eye on some of the neighbouring châteaux whose owners were suspected of aiding and abetting the brigands and of harbouring such impudent pretenders as the ci-devant Duc de Berry, who styled himself the future King of France. Foremost among these was apparently the château de la Villorée.

"The soldiers had talked much of the *Cabaret du Pélican* as being one of the head-quarters of Cottereau and his Chouans. It was situated, so they said, about half a league from here on the confines of a village called Soulanges. I decided to wend my way thither, despite the lateness of the hour, and thence, if possible, to reconnoitre the approach to La Villorée which was close by.

"After much circumlocution and vague questionings, I succeeded in gathering the information I required for finding my way to Soulanges. I then called to the landlord, paid for my supper, and bidding the company a hearty good night, Bunch and I sallied forth for a further tramp through the rain and the gloom."

CHAPTER XX

THE two leagues which were said to lie between Donnay—the little town they had just left—and the village of Soulanges proved longer than any that the adventurers had ever encountered in their lives before.

"Only eight miles, Bunch," his lordship had said gaily at the start. Since then a thin drizzle had begun to fall and was wetting them to the bone. They had had a good supper, but they had walked sixteen miles since morning.

"Only another couple of miles, Bunch," his lordship cried still gaily, when at last, after close on three hours' weary tramp they spied a few dim lights which indicated that Soulanges was in sight. On the confine of the village the sign *Cabaret du Pélican*, representing a bird that seemed a cross between a stork and a goose dangled from a half-broken post—Cottereau's head-quarters, if the soldiers had spoken rightly, and it looked it! The cabaret itself was of the same type as the *Chat qui saute*. It presented its

narrow side to the road, and appeared to be backed by dark clumps of trees and shrubs, and in part surrounded by a wall. The whole place was wellnigh in complete darkness, and it was difficult to see where the entrance was.

Instinct commanded Saint-Denys to reconnoitre the ground cautiously. The house was evidently isolated from other buildings. From the road a path led to the left side of it, and here a feeble light glimmering through a window threw a bright patch across the path piercing the outside darkness. The open country lay in this direction. On the right of the house a narrow lane ran between its wall and the first cottage in the village street. This lane was in total darkness.

Saint-Denys decided to first explore the path on the left. He signed to Mr. Bunch to follow him. Advancing cautiously he came upon a door which he tried to push open. It was locked. He gave a gentle knock, and immediately from the inside a harsh voice called out, "*Qui va là?*"

"Travellers!" Saint-Denys called out in response.

"Go your way elsewhere," the harsh voice retorted. "We want no travellers here."

This, of course, was the usual way in which Saint-Denys's request for bed or board was responded to, and during his many tramps through the country-side, he had made it a habit to ignore the harsh order to go elsewhere, and to force his way into the presence of surly landlord or querulous woman, when English money generously spent ended in getting him what he wanted for himself and Bunch.

But in this village, and at the door of this particular cabaret, extra caution was necessary. He had been told by the gendarmes at Donnay that these were, in fact, Cottereau's head-quarters, where he held council with his chief followers and formulated his unavowed plans of murder and brigandage. And caution at this moment was all the more necessary, as in the harsh voice which had just bidden him to go his way, Saint-Denys had recognised that of Cottereau.

So, instead of forcing a foolhardy entrance into the wolf's den, Saint-Denys, playing the rôle of a discomfited traveller, swore aloud and very lustily: rapped several times on the door, kicked it with his boot, and then he and Bunch stepped away from it, and down the path, clanging their heels against the stones, as men would who were going away in high dudgeon. After which they came back on tiptoe, went past the door as far as the window, and while Mr. Bunch crouched in the darkness, his master

peeped through the window into the room within. It was large, low and almost bare of furniture, save for a table in the centre, a bench or two and an old-fashioned clock up on the wall. A dim light was shed by four tallow-candles set in pewter sconces on the table. Round the table a number of men were assembled. They were eating bread and cheese and drinking cider. There were at least twenty or thirty of them, the usual crowd, sun-tanned, rough and surly. Some were sitting on the table, others on the benches against the wall opposite, others again were standing about with mugs in their hands, biting into large chunks of bread. A rough-looking lot, with rugged faces that appeared almost ghoulis in the flickering candle-light.

That something unusual was here in preparation and had been discussed before Saint-Denys had knocked on the door, was at once obvious. His sharp, quick eyes searching the dark corners of the room, spied a number of muskets piled up in an angle of the wall, with a few pikes and a scythe or two. Just then one of them rapped his mug on the table, and called loudly :

"Obé? la mère Gaillard! More cider!"

The old familiar voice! Saint-Denys was conscious of a pleasant thrill as the man who had called out turned his face toward the window. It was in truth Cottereau. He had on a wide leather belt in which gleamed the brass-studded butts of two pistols. His face, framed by his huge black beard and shaggy hair, looked even more forbidding than before. He rose abruptly and stalked to the window, peering out into the night, but Saint-Denys and Mr. Bunch had already crept warily out of range.

They remained crouching for a time in the densest part of the shadows, waiting for events to unfold themselves. A few minutes later two men came down the road, turned into the path and knocked at the door. The same harsh voice called out *"Qui va là?"* One of the men responded *"Legros."* Whereupon the door opened, and the men stepped into the cabaret.

A few minutes went by, then another man came along, and was admitted in the same way. After that another, and yet another, until a dozen men had given the same password and gone to join the rough crowd in the cabaret. Most of them carried muskets, and one or two had pistols in their belts.

Saint-Denys strained his ears to listen, and hear what went on in the room, but the men in there talked patois, and he could not catch a word. They were discussing some plan—that was obvious. Cottereau was the spokesman, and was giving them orders. They all hung round him, leaning over the table. If one of them ven-

tured on an objection it was swept aside by Cottereau with an emphatic gesture.

Then suddenly the dull thud of horses' hoofs sounded in the distance. Gradually it drew nearer. The men inside also heard it. Their attitude became one of eager expectancy. Cottereau rose abruptly and went to the door. The two watchers in the night had barely time to retreat into the outermost darkness round the nearest angle of the building, one which faced the road. Two riders came along and drew rein in the road in front of the house. Cottereau came down the path to greet them. He put out his hand to help one of them to alight, but the second rider forestalled him in this. Another man brought out an iron lanthorn and lighted the newcomers along the path. From the murky corner where he crouched unseen Saint-Denys could vaguely distinguish them, as they walked quickly up to the door. Two youths, they appeared to be, in riding boots and breeches, with their sugar-loaf hats pulled down over their eyes, and dark capes slung in voluminous folds over their shoulders. The man with the lanthorn went back to look after the horses, and the others went into the house.

Saint-Denys, though burning with impatience, had perforce to wait until the man with the lanthorn had returned. He was longing to glue his face once more against the window and have a close look at those two young men, one of whom had been greeted so deferentially by Cottereau. He could hear the man leading the horses to the rear of the house, his moving and shifting about for some time. At last he came back, swinging his lanthorn, and rejoined his friends in the cabaret. A few seconds later Saint-Denys, leaving Bunch to look after himself, was once more at the window. The men were all there, crowded round one end of the table where Cottereau sat talking earnestly, his dark, glowering eyes fixed on the two young men who sat opposite to him; one of them immediately faced the window. He had thrown down his hat, and Saint-Denys saw his face clearly by the light of the tallow candle on the table—a pure oval with unruly fair hair, deep blue eyes and rebellious mouth. His heart gave a sudden leap. The delicate oval, the colour of the hair, the deep blue eyes, the drooping mouth—all reminded him of the one face that had haunted his dreams these many days past. Her brother, of a certainty! But he had scarce time to collect his impressions before the other new-comer, who sat with his back to the window, turned to say a word to Cottereau. This time Saint-Denys had some difficulty in repressing a cry. The delicate profile now turned to him was Félice. Félice in riding-coat and breeches, her fair hair tucked in-

side her hat, a few stray curls alone escaping from under the brim! He remained for a while stock still, gazing his fill on the vision of his dreams. She sat quite motionless, listening to Cottereau, who talked volubly and with emphatic gestures. He seemed to be trying to persuade her into something against which she rebelled, for her brows were drawn together in a frown, and there was a firm, obstinate line round her perfect mouth. Her brother, on the other hand, seemed to agree with Cottereau. He leaned forward, talking earnestly to his sister, with his hand on her arm and appealing eyes fixed on her face. The hum of voices came to Martin's ears, but not the words, which was all the more exasperating as the three were now talking French. The others stood about whispering to one another or listening intently to the discussion. Now and then when Cottereau paused for breath they nodded approvingly; evidently they were all on his side. It was wonderful how that beautiful, refined girl could sit there among all these rough louts, standing her ground against the irascible Cottereau with no one to protect her save that fair-haired brother of hers, who looked a weakling and was obviously under the stronger man's influence.

At one moment she seemed worried with the heat. The atmosphere in the room, with all those men in their steaming clothes, must have been overpowering. She took off her hat and passed a handkerchief over her forehead. One of the men went to open the door. She thanked him with a smile and a nod. The door remained ajar. Talk was resumed, and the words now came distinctly to Martin's ears.

Félice's firm, "Monseigneur should never have been dragged into this." And Cottereau's gruff, "He need not know . . . until afterwards."

"But when he does," she retorted.

Cottereau gave a harsh laugh.

"The money will have been spent by then, and he will be a step nearer to regaining his throne."

"And another blot will sully the fair name of the Bourbons."

"Hush, little sister!" the brother intervened. "You must not talk like that. We must have money, and we've got to get it somehow, or adieu for ever to any hope of seeing our King once more in France."

"Better that, than——"

She checked herself, probably in response to an earnest mute appeal from her brother. And suddenly she said to him in English:

"René, surely you will not allow this to go on?"

And he replied also in English :

"But, my dearest, you must admit that Jacques knows best. Without him, where are we?"

"On cleaner ground, methinks."

"Don't say that, Félice. It hurts me to hear you say it when our King owes everything to him."

"Everything?" she retorted with a shrug.

"He holds the country-side. The men will follow him to the death. . . ."

"To dishonour!"

"If our King ever comes into his own again, it will be chiefly thanks to this one man."

"Who murdered our little Alain."

The young man frowned. His face looked sullen and rebellious, something of Cottereau's glowering glance crept into his eyes.

"It was an accident," he said harshly, "and you know it. It is cruel to speak of it now."

While this talk in a foreign tongue went on, Cottereau sat by, grim-visaged and morose. Clearly he didn't understand what was said, for his eyes wandered restlessly from one face to the other, as if trying to read the thoughts that were being put into words. But the looker-on the other side of the window, with eyes sharpened by a sudden stab of jealousy noted how earnest was the glance with which the Chouan leader regarded Félice. It could not be said that the glance softened, but rather that it acquired an intensity of expression, a feverish searching of the beautiful face which could only be due to one cause.

After her brother's last remark, which was in the nature of a bitter reproach, Félice said nothing more. Cottereau presently rose and began pacing the floor restlessly. At one moment he threw the door farther open and peered out into the darkness; when he went back into the room he kicked the door to and muttered a savage oath. The door closed with a loud bang, and Saint-Denys was once more shut out from what went on inside. Unfortunately the night now did him a bad turn. The fine rain had left off some time ago, and gradually the sky cleared until presently the moon peeped out in all her glory from a bank of clouds. The side of the house was flooded with light; Martin perforce had to retreat behind its darkest angle and to curb his impatience as best he could.

Here he found Mr. Bunch, who solemn and unmoved, had been patiently waiting until his lordship would again require

him. The man was wholly incurious. The whole adventure, with all its vicissitudes, only affected him in so far that it happened to be his lordship's pleasure to travel in this God-forsaken land, when he would be so much more comfortable in his house in Berkeley Square.

CHAPTER XXI

THE night had become beautifully clear and bright.

Somewhere up the road a church clock struck twelve. Nearly an hour had gone by since Martin Saint-Denys had taken refuge in the dark angle of the house: an hour during which he had leisure to review his entire position and strike a balance 'twixt chance and mischance. On the credit side there were two facts: one was that he had run the enemy to earth. He had Cottereau under his eye now at head-quarters, with his adherents around him and nothing but sheer bad luck would make him lose sight of the man again. The other was that Félise was nigh.

On the debit side there was only the question of time, but that was a grave question. Saint-Denys had heard and guessed enough to realise that some of Cottereau's nefarious plans were on the point of materialising: what these plans were Saint-Denys could not even conjecture, but that they were nefarious, as indeed Mr. Legros had said that they were, was clear from the few words spoken by Félise to her brother, and the one significant phrase uttered by Cottereau when referring to the Duc de Berry: "He need not know till afterwards!"

The angle of the house in which he and his faithful Bunch had found a safe hiding-place behind a thick clump of lilac bushes turned out to be formed by a porch, which was evidently the front entrance of the *cabaret*. Like the back door, this entrance was at right-angles to the road, in the narrow lane which lay between the *cabaret* and the nearest cottage wall. Nothing much had happened while the two men crouched there in the darkness. They had a full view of the road, now flooded in moonlight. They could see some of the men coming away from the inn in groups of threes and fours. They all carried muskets and all turned in the same direction down the road, towards the open country and away from the village.

Soon after midnight, Saint-Denys had the satisfaction of seeing a man coming down the lane swinging a lanthorn and leading a horse. A few minutes later Félise and her brother came out of the

cabaret and stood for a few moments in the porch. Behind them a man and woman hovered—probably the landlord and his wife. Félice was so near to Martin that he could have touched her cloak, did he but stretch out his arm.

Brother and sister were talking earnestly together in English; evidently they used the language, which they spoke remarkably well, for talk not intended for prying ears.

"You won't alarm mother unduly, will you, Félice? I assure you everything will be all right."

"No," she replied curtly, "I will not alarm mother."

"And, of course, not a word to Monseigneur, should you perchance see him. He would not believe you, and, anyway, he could not stop us now."

To this she made no reply, but Martin heard a heavy sigh which sounded like a sob. He would have liked to punch young René's head, if that had been any good. As it was he could only watch Félice—watch and wonder at the perfect grace of her as she swung herself into the saddle like a young Amazon: her body was straight and slim as a sapling and her movements were those of a faun. One fair curl had escaped from under her hat-brim and a moonbeam forthwith turned it into a ray of gold. She gathered the reins in her hands and gave a low click with her tongue. She was going to ride alone, alone in the night, fearless, and he, Martin, would follow her, speak with her, perhaps touch her hand!

"Mademoiselle, I love you," that is what he would say to her presently: "will you tell me where I can find the heir to the throne of France?"

Less than an hour ago he would never have hoped that it would be so simple.

But for the moment he had to possess his soul in patience, for young René and the landlord still stood in the porch intent in watching the progress of the rider, and Saint-Denys was forced to wait, while the thud of her horse's hoofs which carried Félice farther and farther away resounded in his ears like the beating of his own heart. She rode at foot-pace through the village, leaving her mount to pick its way in the street riddled with holes and ruts. At one moment he was on the point of throwing prudence to the winds and running after her in full view of the two men in the porch, lest presently she disappeared from his sight. It was only the thought of the earnestness of his mission, the risk of losing a splendid chance on a foolish throw that kept his impatience on the curb.

Presently, however, René de Marillac and the landlord turned

in, and with one bound Martin was out in the road, running for all he was worth. The village street was silent and lonely; not a light in any cottage window, not a passer-by. The moon lay sleeping on thatched roofs and church steeple. Once past the village the rider put her horse to a trot. Half a mile further on Martin overtook her and the next moment he had her horse by the bridle. It reared, and suddenly he found himself looking straight into the muzzle of a pistol within half a yard of his face. The young Amazon rode alone, but she knew how to protect herself.

"Hands up or I fire!" she called.

"I am no footpad, mademoiselle," Martin was quick to answer, and did so in English. "Look, I entreat you!"

He held up his hand, on one finger of which he wore the ring which Monsieur Legros had given him. If she recognised it all would be well. She still held the pistol, but she kept her horse reined in. His calling to her in English, or perhaps the sight of the ring, had evidently reassured her; or, again, she may have recognised his voice, for she asked quite calmly:

"What is it? Who are you?"

He took off his hat and turned his face up to the moon.

"My lord—er—Saint-Denys!" she exclaimed.

"You deign to remember my name?"

"Yes, of course—at the *Chat qui Saute*! But in God's name what are you doing here?"

"Will you listen to me, mademoiselle, for I would wish to tell you?"

For a second or so she seemed to hesitate, and then she turned her horse on the grass that bordered the road. He followed.

"Now, my lord," she said.

"Mademoiselle," he began, "you will, I am afraid, have to take much for granted. I have come here at the earnest request of a certain Monsieur Legros . . ."

He paused, for she had given a kind of gasp. But all she said was:

"Go on, my lord."

"Monsieur Legros," Saint-Denys went on, speaking rapidly, "came to see me in London. He told me that Monseigneur the Duc de Berry was in France; that certain irregular troops here in Normandy were led by a fanatic named Cottereau, whose methods of warfare were bringing discredit on the King's cause. He entrusted certain papers to me, together with the ring I have just shown you—papers which he said would open the Duke's eyes as to Cottereau's unavowable enterprises. I have sworn a solemn

oath that I would find the future King of France and put the papers before him; and I have sworn not to leave his side until I have seen him safely on his way back to England. Difficulties and suspicion have met me at every turn. Fifteen days have gone by and Monsieur Legros warned me that every day would be perilous. You know where the Duke is, mademoiselle. I pray you to tell me where I can find him."

She had listened to him in silence, motionless in her saddle, never once taking her eyes off his face. He had his arm round the horse's neck. Her horse! And while he spoke he pressed his face now and again against the soft warm nose. The landscape around, bathed in moonlight, was utterly desolate. Loneliness encompassed her and him and the beautiful satin-skinned animal. He felt immeasurably happy in this loneliness. Just she alone with him, sharing the secret which had been confided to him! He hoped that time would stand still, or eternity begin.

Not in love? God! what a fool he had been not to realise that at the very first sight of her he had fallen desperately in love—in love with her beauty, with her charm, with all of her that exhaled sentiment and romance; her perfect body, her mysterious soul. Not in love? It had been sacrilege to deny that every sinew of his body ached with longing at this hour to jump into the saddle behind her, to fold her in his arms and then to give the horse free rein to gallop away unknown distances into the heavenly realms above.

"As you were saying, my lord?"

What had he said? He didn't know. To think that it should be the sound of her voice that brought him back to earth! He must have murmured something without meaning to. Perhaps he had told her how adorable she was, and how he worshipped her. He didn't know. But, anyway, she did not hear or she would not have asked. Thank God for that! for he felt ashamed, a traitor to the trust which had been put in him. How could he forget it, even at such an hour? But now it all came back; his head was still buzzing, but it all came back—the trust, his solemn promise. "So very French," he had thought at the time, when he and the little fat man had shaken hands across the bureau in Berkeley Square, but solemn, nevertheless, and binding as a word of honour is binding on a gentleman.

"I was begging you, mademoiselle," he said as soberly as he could, "to tell me how I can find Monseigneur the Duc de Berry."

"Begging me, my lord?" she queried. "Begging me? You? Why?"

"Because Monsieur Legros told me that there is one person here who alone hath probed the depths of Cottereau's tortuous soul and knows to what lengths of infamy his fanaticism may carry him. That person is you, mademoiselle."

Then, as she remained silent, looking down on him as if it was his soul now that she desired to probe, he went on:

"Monsieur Legros also said that if there were more men and women like Mademoiselle de Marillac the honour of the Royal house of France would be safe. Because of this he gave me leave to share his secret and mine with you. That is why I ask you, mademoiselle, to tell me where I can find the Duc de Berry."

She shook her head and a heavy sigh escaped her.

"I wish I could, my lord," she said. "Believe me, I wish I could!"

"You do not trust me?"

"I trust you, yes. You are English, and then there is the ring. But, my lord, only a privileged few are allowed to know where Monseigneur is. He is here one day and gone the next. Hé was with us at La Villorée a week ago . . ."

"But you, mademoiselle?"

"I am not one of the privileged few, my lord," she said, with a little catch in her throat. "They do not trust me . . . they know that I. . . . So I do not know."

"You do not know . . . ?"

It seemed incredible—impossible—that she, this wonderful woman, the daughter of Madame la Marquise de Marillac—that she should not be trusted; that she should be an object of suspicion, just as he, a stranger—presumably a spy—had himself been since first he landed. It seemed almost ludicrous. And what a strange irony of Fate! Here he was, within sight of goal, in touch with the one being in all this hostile country-side who might have helped him, if anyone could, and yet, even now, when he saw a glimmer of daylight in this dark maze of political intrigues, he came up against the ever present stone wall of enmity and distrust which had balked him at every turn. Indeed, Martin felt at this moment that, though he had met with many difficulties since his arrival in this turbulent country, not one had been so hopeless and, at the same time, so futile.

And out of the bitterness of his heart he said almost roughly:

"Does anyone ever trust anyone else in this God-forsaken country, mademoiselle?"

As soon as he had uttered the words he repented, for she gave no answer—only sighed and turned her head away, perhaps to

hide her tears. What a brute he was—what a brute! He would have given years of his life to be allowed to kiss her, and he had made her cry!

"Forgive me, mademoiselle," he murmured, ashamed and penitent. "I did not mean——"

"Oh, I know, my lord, I know!" she broke in a trifle impatiently. "We must seem a queer, savage lot to you! It is the two factions you understand—nay, factions is not the right word, for we all have the same cause at heart. There is not one of us who is not ready to give life, everything for our King. But some of us take one view and some another, and, alas! rivalry has more than once turned to enmity, even to treachery. And the future King of France is pulled first one way and then another, and truly he does not know whom he dares trust. It is all a terrible tangle, my lord. God knows how it will all end!"

He could have listened to her for ever, so sweet and melodious was her voice with that little catch in it now and then as of a sob that rose from her delicate throat. And listening to her, he recalled the first impression he had of her—of a helpless and unhappy child. He knew now that, though she was unhappy and, in a way, helpless, she certainly was not a child. She was a woman, with all a woman's energy and strength, fettered only by high ideals and rigid conceptions of loyalty; a woman essentially to be trusted. And those blind fools mistrusted her, made her unhappy and helpless.

He had learned from Legros that the girl was out of sympathy with the Chouan leader's plans, nor had he before this thought of Cottereau as anything but the leader, the prime mover, in an unavowable enterprise, whom, as such, he had pledged himself to thwart; but only as such.

But while listening at the window of the *Cabaret du Pélican* he had caught the strange, ardent glance with which Cottereau regarded Félise de Marillac, and at once he was conscious of a pang of jealousy. Cottereau, the Chouan leader, was in that one instant transformed in his sight. He became Jacques Cottereau, the man, a reckless, almost savage creature of primitive passions, of ardent hate and love. Had he then dared . . . ?

And almost against his will Martin found himself speaking the name which was uppermost in his mind.

"But Cottereau, mademoiselle?"

"Yes, my lord? The leader of our men; you were asking . . . ?"

"Whether you trusted him."

"No," she said curtly, and then quickly added: "No, and yes."

"He has great influence."

"Over poor people, yes; they are so wretched, you see, so unfortunate. They have nothing to lose and perhaps something to gain by all that brigandage. They do not understand that it brings discredit on us all and that they are harming the King's cause, which they really have very much at heart. Now and again the police get hold of some of them; then there are perquisitions, arrests, executions and tears—endless tears."

"If only the police were clever enough to capture Cottereau . . . !" Martin exclaimed fervently.

"Don't say that, my lord! We've had enough tragedies of that sort! I could name you a dozen of our leaders who have fallen into the hands of Bonaparte's police and who ended their brave lives on the scaffold—they and often their families with them—women, my lord, and young girls. No, no!" Félice continued more vehemently. "Cottereau may be all wrong in his methods, but he believes honestly that they help the King's cause, and his courage and enthusiasm are wonderful."

Once again Martin was conscious of that intensely masculine pang of jealousy. What was it that caused her to defend the man so warmly? Was it only that her loyalty was on the *qui vive*? She disapproved of his methods, yes; but had his forceful personality, his amazing courage, the romance, perhaps, that gave lustre to his very boorishness, stirred sensitive fibres in the heart of this refined and high-born lady? Such strange vagaries in feminine nature did occur sometimes, and hatred and love were so nearly akin.

All at once he was conscious that this heaven-sent interview was coming to an end. Félice de Marillac was now silent. She busied herself in slipping her pistol back into the holster.

"You are not going, mademoiselle?" he exclaimed involuntarily.

"Indeed, my lord, I must. The hour is late, and my mother——"

"Then, may I come with you?"

"No, no!" she hastened to say, but he thought that she smiled.

"Mademoiselle," he entreated, "before you go—if go you must, though God knows I would wish to keep you here until the crack of doom, with the night breeze stirring your hair and——"

"My lord!"

"I know, I know!" he went on with a quick, impatient sigh. "I am a presumptuous fool. But God made women like you beautiful so that man might have an early glimpse of Paradise. No, no, I shall not transgress again! All I want is to beg you to rack

your brains for some word, some hint, that will put me on the right track. I'll act on it. I swear I'll find the way. I'll find it anyhow, for I have pledged my word."

"But, my lord," she exclaimed, "why in Heaven's name did you do that? What is the Duc de Berry to you—or the King of France? Why have you come here?"

"Thank God I have, or I'd never have seen you!"

She chose to ignore these words; perhaps she did not hear them, for, in fact, he had murmured them scarce above a whisper.

"Why did you come?" she insisted. "What are any of us to you?"

"Nothing, once, I admit," he replied, "but everything now. I came because I was bored and longed for some excitement that would take me out of myself. I am nothing, mademoiselle, but a ne'er-do-well, a gambler, who has nothing left to stake; a man without purpose in life, with not much brains and an atrophied heart. Indeed, I cared naught for the Duc de Berry or for the King of France. As to that, it will be England, believe me, who will set the Bourbons on their throne again. It won't be Cottereau and his like, be sure of that. But until then what mattered it all to me? I came because I loved adventure for adventure's sake, and because I suffered from incurable ennui; so I pledged my solemn word of honour to a mysterious personage named Monsieur Legros——"

"Monsieur Legros? Do you know who he is?"

"I do not. But he seemed a man in authority. He gave me Cottereau's papers and begged me to give them into the hands of the Duc de Berry. He gave me this ring, and I swore an oath. We held hands across my writing-desk. We were very solemn and very French. . . ."

"Legros, my lord, is the password of the Chouans."

"I know it."

"And why should this Monsieur—Legros have come to you, my lord?"

"Some day I will tell you, if you deign to listen. But now all I want is to make you believe that the moment I saw you the cause which you have at heart has become as mine own. Before that heavenly hour at the *Chat qui Saute* my word of honour alone impelled me. But now the Duc de Berry, these papers which I am to give him, the honour of your cause, have become the very essence of my life. Not only is mine honour bound up in them, but my whole future and my every hope."

She had not interrupted him. That, thought Martin, was one

thing gained. So long as a woman will listen, the man is a fool, thought he, who cannot gain some response to his ardour. And Félise de Marillac did listen. She sat almost motionless in her saddle and looked down on his face. Her own was in shadow. Now, when he finished speaking, she sighed once or twice and murmured in a pathetic, helpless way :

"I wish I could!" and "*Mon Dieu!* I wish I could!"

Then all at once she said :

"My lord, Cottereau vows that you are a spy. Did you know that?"

"I guessed it."

"He may have some inkling of your purpose."

"Probably."

"The orders are that you are to be shot on sight."

"Our friend Cottereau does me too much honour."

"Listen, my lord!" she went on, speaking earnestly and rapidly. "Let me prove to you that I, at any rate, do trust you and would help you if I could. There is only one person in these parts who is always deep in the Duke's counsels, and that is my brother. He always knows where to find Monseigneur. He and I, alas! do not see eye to eye in all this, and he is entirely under the domination of Cottereau. If you get him in one of those moods when Cottereau's influence is strongest on him, you will get nothing out of him. But he is weak, vacillating. In any case, do not lose sight of him. Go back to the *Cabaret du Pélican* now. You will still find him there. Sooner or later he will be in touch with Monseigneur, and if God grants that this happens before Cottereau's plans are carried through, then you will have done more than keep your word, my lord. You will have saved us all from disgrace."

Those were, indeed, heavenly words, for they proved that she believed in him and trusted him. But, alas! the tragedy followed all too soon, the tragedy of her departure. For now she really was going. Saint-Denys felt that nothing he could say would stop her going from him. Her little hand was busy with the holster. He seized it and covered it with kisses.

"When shall I see you again?" he begged ardently, passionately.

But she replied quite coolly: "Some day, perhaps—who knows?"

"I only live for that some day," he retorted with a smile.

"It rests with you, my lord." And then, all at once, she added with deep earnestness: "In the name of God I pray you lose no time! May His holy angels guide you and keep you and His blessing rest upon your enterprise!"

And then she was gone—gone into the moonlight and into the night. Every thud of the horse's hoofs took her farther and farther away from him. He watched her until rider and horse were a mere speck on the moonlit road. Then she disappeared altogether. From where he was standing the road began to dip, then rose again and again fell away, and she had disappeared over the crest of the hill, alone and fearless. Far away beyond the brow of the hill a wooded slope hid the horizon-line. Through the trees the square bastions and steep pointed roof of a house glimmered in the pale light of the moon.

CHAPTER XXII

AS soon as he had lost sight of the living object of his dreams Saint-Denys started to go back at a run. He felt more hopeful than he had done ever since he started on his quest, more exhilarated. The moon was past her zenith, the shadows were long and a translucent blue. The first tang of spring was in the night air now that the wind had dropped and the rain had left its beneficent mantle of moisture over the earth. Saint-Denys, while he ran, breathed in the soft air with its sharp smell of ozone and the taste of salt which stung his lips. He covered the ground that separated him from the village like a hound on the scent, living over during this brief half-hour that other half-hour which had just gone by. He was rudely awakened from his absorption by the startling sight which met his gaze as soon as he rounded the village street and came in sight of the *Cabaret du Pélican* a couple of hundred yards farther on. At the corner of the narrow lane which lay between the *cabaret* and the nearest cottage a group of men—five or six perhaps—were pushing and jostling, apparently engaged in a fight. Martin could only see their backs, a dark medley of heaving shoulders, arms upraised and clenched fists brandishing cudgels or sticks.

"My God!" he exclaimed with a sharp intake of the breath. "Bunch!"

In less than three minutes he had covered the distance which separated him from the lane: he went round behind the cottage and a few seconds later found himself by Bunch's side, facing the crowd: Bunch hard pressed in this dark and narrow lane, with the men pushing and striking out with their fists and some of them with sticks. But now Saint-Denys was beside him. The ground was soft, the shadows dense, the men had neither seen

nor heard him come, but in a moment he had drawn his pistol from his belt and used its butt to good effect on the heads nearest to him. How long Bunch had been in this sorry plight he did not know, or how he came to be out in the open, but master and servant were past masters in the art of self-defence, and used this art to some purpose, even though they were outnumbered three to one. Fortunately the men had left their muskets behind, had been drinking and talking probably when a false move on Bunch's part had drawn their attention to him. Discovered in his hiding-place, he had taken to his heels and they had cornered him in this narrow lane, where fortunately his lordship had come to his aid just in time. They had the surrounding wall of the *cabaret* on one side of them and that of the cottage on the other, and as Saint-Denys's pistol wrought havoc in plenty they had some hope of being able ultimately to take to their heels and to run for their lives. Martin had wrenched a cudgel out of one of the fellow's hands and was using it as a singlestick with excellent effect. And "This for you, my friend!" and "That to teach you manners!" he muttered between his teeth as he brought the primitive weapon with a good crack down upon whatever came nigh. Had it not been for the inky darkness . . . But there! even so he positively enjoyed this vulgar brawl, an enjoyment he had not tasted since he was a cornet in His Majesty's Dragoons! With laughter and cheers he encouraged Mr. Bunch, who more portly and more used to a life of ease, was not quite so nimble as his lordship, but nevertheless did give a very good account of himself. The Chouans fought without a sound because years of guerrilla fighting had taught them the value of silence, and, indeed, all might yet have been well for the two Englishmen had not one of their assailants suddenly uttered the Chouan's rallying call: the cry of the screech-owl rang out through the night. At once those of the men who had remained in the *cabaret*, not knowing what was going on outside, seized their muskets and came trooping out. Cottureau was among these, but this Saint-Denys did not know, for it was pitch-dark in the lane. All he could see was that the numbers facing him and Bunch had swelled considerably, and he could hear the patter of more feet running in this direction. The odds were becoming too great. Though the lane was narrow, they were being pushed back by force of numbers. Soon they would be in the open behind the row of cottages, when the moonlight would stream down upon them, and even taking to their heels would be of no avail. Saint-Denys's ears were buzzing. He had received one or two severe blows on the head. It was a question of selling

one's life dearly or taking one's chance with these ruffians. Cottereau's voice was heard above the rest encouraging the men to bring this fight to a finish. "One of these damned spies!" he called out. "At them, then!" Obviously there wouldn't be much chance of life at the hands of these fanatics.

They had to give way step by step, Saint-Denys and Bunch, master and servant, the two of them . . . step by step. . . . They could not look behind them, nor could they see how long or how short was the lane. Untiring, defiant, stubborn, and grim they fought on, with cudgels snatched from their assailants and fists that struck unerringly. But they had to give way, step by step, for though some of the enemy had fallen by the way, others sprang up as if out of the earth. Had the lane not been so narrow or had the gloom here been less intense, they could not have held out so long. But now the end was nigh. The open ground flooded in moonlight was close behind. And still they came, whilst from time to time the cry of the screech-owl resounded through the night.

Step by step they were forced to retreat. Saint-Denys, with a great gash across his forehead, was blinded by the blood which streamed down his face, and suddenly Bunch uttered a hoarse cry, which was very nearly echoed by his lordship. They had suddenly found themselves up against something that seemed to retreat with them, something that gave under their weight, something that went back as they did, step by step. They were out in the open. There was the *cabaret* in front of them on the right, the cottage on the left, the moon above flooding them with light. There were the men close to them and Cottereau's great bulk towering above. There was the singing in their ears, intermixed with Cottereau's harsh laugh and jeers. And then all of a sudden the whole earth gave way under their feet. They heard a crash, they felt themselves go. The cudgels fell out of their hands and they clutched at whatever was nigh, but it was nothing, nothing but twigs and branches, lichen and ivy, to which they clung despairingly until they felt nothing but loose stones in their hands, nothing but the moonlight above and darkness, utter darkness below, into which they sank in complete unconsciousness. The last sound that reached their ears was a harsh laugh and the rustle of dead leaves and branches, then the cry of the screech-owl, while a heavy stone came hurtling down after them from above.

CHAPTER XXIII

IN his "Indiscretions" Lord Saint-Denys touches very lightly on the terrible plight in which he and his faithful Bunch found themselves when they recovered sufficient consciousness to realise where they were. Martin, it seems, was engaged in wiping the blood from Bunch's face with the one clean handkerchief which had survived the many adventures, when the poor fellow opened his eyes. They must have been lying here for hours, for a pale ray of morning light was just visible, peeping in obliquely from above through a tangle of brushwood. The ground on which they lay was quite soft and shiny, and when Martin first put out his hand to feel where they were it sank in puddles of muddy water. Indeed, it was the mud and the slime that had broken their fall. But he left further investigations until such time as he had made poor old Bunch a little more comfortable.

"Any broken bones, Bunch?" he asked as soon as the other stirred.

"Broken 'ead, my lord," Bunch responded feebly.

"Well, we are keeping Truth company, you and I, my friend."

"Truth, my lord?"

"A legend, Bunch. Truth at the bottom of a well. And here we are keeping her company."

"Yes, my lord," Bunch murmured, trying to understand.

His lordship was dabbing his, Bunch's, forehead with his handkerchief, a procedure to which no gentleman's gentleman should be expected to submit. And Bunch duly tried to raise himself on his elbow, whereat his lordship waxed impatient.

"Just close your eyes, you demmed idiot!" he was pleased to say, "and try to get some sleep while I have a look round."

Again Bunch tried to stir, but he felt sick and giddy and perforce had to lie still.

"'Ow's your lordship?" he murmured feebly.

"Quite all right, Bunch, thank'ee, save for that crack on the head and a few strained joints. But we've seen worse than that, you and I, before now, what?"

Bunch groaned, and Martin uttered the pious prayer that the poor fellow had not cracked his skull in the fall. How they both escaped such a dire calamity was indeed wonderful. That would have been the end of all things, the end of their career certainly, but it is a fact that the more reckless and wild an adventurer happens to be the more lives does chance give him to throw away—nine at the least, like the proverbial cat. Neither master nor

servant had cracked their skulls in falling; instinct had guided their hand toward the strands of ivy that fell down the sides of this disused well. Bunch, being the older, had fallen more heavily, but against that he had more flesh on his bones, and flesh with a layer of fat had broken the fall. Indeed, his lordship, although he was unversed, as he himself says more than once in his "Indiscretions," in the art of writing, gives a fairly detailed account of this portion of his adventures in the fourteenth chapter of his book :

"For here we were, Bunch and I," he says, "keeping Truth company at the bottom of a well, and a disused one at that, and wallowing in the mud like a pair of hogs, thanking God that we were not up to our necks or more in water. While the poor fellow lay in a troubled sleep, moaning and groaning, I did my best to find out what chance we had of getting out of this hole alive. And as the light of day crept round slowly and more directly into the well, one or two signs more or less hopeful were gradually revealed to me. On the ground, not far from where I had fallen, my groping hand came in collision with what proved to be a wicker basket tied to a length of broken rope. The rope was eight or nine feet long, and the break looked recent. I thought it possible that either Bunch or I may have clutched at it when we fell, and that the break had occurred then. I peered up into the gloom, thinking I might see the other broken end of the rope, but without success.

"I next set about inspecting the walls. They were of rough-hewn stone, greasy with slime, and I soon realised that alone I could not have kept a foothold on them for long, nor would it have been possible to use them as stepping-stones for any distance up the side. Still with the two of us, one aiding the other, we might presently have a try. Using the uneven projections of the stones as support for my feet, or hanging on by my hands where I could, I made a tour of the circular wall at a height of some four feet from the ground. But I had to admit to myself that this tour of inspection did not end as hopefully as I might have wished. I was just on the point of rousing poor old Bunch so that he should lend me his broad back for another tour higher up, when my eyes were attracted by a large oblong patch in the wall at a height of some ten or twelve feet above my head. I could only distinguish it very vaguely in the gloom, but there was something in its shape, its position, and a kind of straight projecting ledge at its base, which suggested to me that the patch might prove to be a door, a trap-door, probably giving on a drain.

"I could contain my impatience no longer, and though I felt very sorry for my faithful Bunch, and full of sympathy for his aches and pains, I was compelled, for his sake as well as mine, to wake him from his dreams. The less time we spent in the company of Truth the better for us both. And if he was half as thirsty as I he would not be sleeping very heavily either. He was not. I had only to touch him on the shoulder and he woke. He blinked and sat up. Poor fellow! he still was sick and giddy, but the instincts of a lifetime would not be gainsaid. He struggled with difficulty to his feet, and though he stood for a moment swaying with giddiness he was profuse, if somewhat inarticulate, in his apologies for keeping me waiting.

"I lost no time in explaining the situation to him, being more convinced than ever that that oblong patch, the exact nature of which I could not ascertain in the gloom, was some kind of a trap-door. If a trap-door—so I explained to Bunch—it must lead somewhere, if only to—— But there I did not feel inclined to pursue this conjecture further. Is it not marvellous how the instinct of self-preservation overcomes every other sensation in us? Pains, aches, thirst, broken bones: neither I nor Bunch felt any of these troubles while we strove to reach that oblong patch to which I had pinned my faith. Beyond a height of about six feet from the ground the walls of stone were entirely smooth and running with slime: not a foothold anywhere. And though we tried it both ways, that is, I first stood on Bunch's shoulders and then, when I proved too heavy for him in his weak state, I hoisted him on mine, we could not with our hands as much as touch the tantalising ledge which projected from the wall just above our reach. I was having one more try, with poor Bunch staggering under my weight, when chancing to cast anxious glances around, I suddenly spied something which caused my heart to give one exultant thump. In the murkiest arc of the wall I could see vaguely in the darkness a rope hanging from somewhere above. I remembered the basket which lay at the bottom of the well with its length of broken rope, and here evidently was the other end of that rope. That side of the well was so dark that I should never have seen it only that something up above had set it moving—a mouse probably—but did not a mouse in the fable once save a lion? So why not now?

"But it was not the rope itself that set my heart beating so joyfully: it was the fact that the end of it dangled at a height from the ground that was lower than the level of the blessed ledge. Not many seconds went by—thirty at most—before we

shifted our activities to that side of the well. Good old Bunch showed marvellous pluck! I climbed on to his shoulders, and there we were, like those Italian acrobats who are wont to make show of their skill in Vauxhall Gardens doing what they call the human ladder, while the audience clap their hands delightedly. Well, we had no audience to encourage us with their applause, but to spur us to activity we had our ardent desire to get out of this demmed hole alive. I actually had to put my foot on Bunch's head—having previously taken off my boots—before I could reach high enough to seize hold of the end of the rope. I blessed the days when at Eton I was considered to be a good athlete, otherwise the rope nor anything else would have been of the slightest use. As it was, I took firm hold first with one hand, then with two; then I allowed myself to swing clear of Bunch. Grasping the rope now with hands and knees, I shouted to him to set my body swinging by my legs, which he did. And thus I swung in mid-air, swirling at times like a teetotum, or spinning like a top; a most uncomfortable and undignified position for a gentleman to find himself in, but as a schoolboy I had often played this game, as indeed most schoolboys are fond of doing, and, thank God! I had not lost the knack of it, for presently I found myself getting nearer and nearer to the opposite side of the wall where the ledge was already beckoning me to safety."

Thus do we get Lord Saint-Denys's experiences in his own words. Throughout that chapter of his *Memoirs* he gives ungrudging praise to Mr. Bunch, and says modestly little about his own prowess. Indeed, he often pokes fun at himself when drawing a picture of an English gentleman dangling at the end of a rope, spinning like a top in mid-air, intent on warding off the imminent danger of knocking his head against the circular wall, while struggling with hand and foot to reach the tantalising ledge. At last Chance, which had been so adverse up to now, did him a good turn, for presently he was able to stretch out one hand, and it came in contact with what proved to be the heavy iron handle of a stout door that was wide open and lay flat against the wall. The oblong patch was nothing but the yawning aperture made by this open door: the ledge was just below it, and the iron handle some three feet higher than the ledge.

To grasp the handle firmly, to let go the rope and leap upon the ledge was the work of a few agonising seconds, but it was done at last. The ledge was wide and solid. The door gave on what appeared to be a tunnel or conduit of some sort, about five feet wide and somewhat lower than a man's height. Close by the

door-posts a couple of stout iron hooks were let into the wall; to these a rope-ladder was attached. The ladder lay just inside the entrance of the tunnel. Had not silence commended itself as imperative, Saint-Denys would of a surety have uttered a hoot of joy. The problem of how to get Bunch up on the ledge had most happily been solved. Without this solution it would have meant death for both of them. As it was, the adventure already appeared exhilarating. Full of excitement Martin felt neither fatigue now nor bodily ache, even though his forehead had started bleeding again and a raging thirst had turned his mouth into a lime kiln.

"'Tention, Bunch!" he called out to his faithful major-domo, as he threw the rope-ladder down over the ledge, "and do not forget my boots."

A few minutes later master and servant were sitting close together just inside the tunnel, with their knees drawn up to their chins, their arms encircling their knees. They surveyed the scene of their perilous exploit.

"A store-place, I suppose," his lordship mused, "for their arms, and a hiding-place for ill-gotten gains. Let's proceed cautiously, Bunch."

They lost no time, however, in making a start. With backs bent and only their hands to guide them, they went along in the pitch darkness.

"We knew not where we would find ourselves," his lordship relates in his Memoirs, "when we came out of this underground burrow. We could only be certain that it would ultimately lead us into the open, so we went along with a stout heart, even though our tongues clove to our palates and our throats were like nutmeg graters.

"Presently the ground rose slightly beneath our feet, and a few yards farther on I stumbled and nearly fell on what seemed like a shallow step. It proved to be the beginning of a stone-paved path—after the fashion of a mule-track such as are found in the south—which led steeply upwards. After a time this resolved itself into a flight of shallow steps which gradually became more and more steep, even while the roof, such as it was, came down lower and lower over our heads."

The two men after this could only proceed on hands and knees, and this with great difficulty.

"Obesity would be a disadvantage in this hole," Martin remarked to himself. "Our friend Legros would find his paunch terribly in the way."

"Well," he murmured presently with a sigh, "so long as the other end of this demmed hole is not bolted against us on the outside. . . ."

CHAPTER XXIV

FOR the past few minutes a thin streak of light had found its way out from somewhere above, and had pierced the inky blackness of the underground passage. Presently Saint-Denys, who was in front, found himself looking down from a certain height into what looked like a cellar of sorts. The thin streak of light came from somewhere ahead of him. Slowly his eyes became accustomed to the semi-gloom, and he was able to discern the circular walls and, immediately facing him, a flight of wooden steps leading up to a trap-door. The underground passage through which the two of them had been crawling debouched in the wall of this cellar some few feet from the ground. They jumped down, and then paused to listen. A confused murmur of voices came to their ears; sounds of men moving overhead, creaking boards. So here they were in the cellar of some kind of habitation, a tower, probably, such as are often found in this part of the country as dependencies to a neighbouring château. Martin had a vague recollection of seeing one partially hidden by trees on the crest of the wooded slope at the back of the village. The tower was probably a rallying place of the Chouans, and the burning question then remained as to what was going to happen overhead. How long would those men stay up there? Would any of them raise the trap-door? Would they prove to be enemies or friends? Was the irascible Cottereau among them? To none of these questions could there be an answer for the moment. The cellar itself appeared to be a store-house for arms and ammunition. There were several kegs, presumably of gunpowder, ranged against the wall, and farther on a number of muskets, scythes and staves stacked up, several old-fashioned pistols and bandoliers, and small boxes containing shot. That, anyway, was a good find, and Saint-Denys and Bunch lost no time in selecting a couple of good muskets and pistols out of the store, also the stoutest bandoliers they could find, and into these they tucked a dozen or so charges and boxes of shot. Thus equipped they felt more ready to face any emergency that might come along. Ensconced in the deepest murkiness of the cellar they waited. How long they knew not. They were hungry, thirsty, and ached in every limb, but they each grasped a musket now, and had loaded pistols in their belts. True that at any

moment they might be discovered, and discovery in the end might mean death for both of them, but they had the feeling that now, at least, they could sell their lives dearly, which, as Lord Saint-Denys declares in his "Indiscretions" was "a very comforting thought indeed."

Whether it was hours or just a few minutes since first they crouched in the darkness they couldn't tell. Whatever it was, minutes or hours, for them the passage of time spelt Eternity. After a time they fell into a kind of torpor, the numbness of utter exhaustion following the exciting events of the night. Overhead the rumble of voices acted on their nerves as a lullaby.

It was the sudden stillness that roused them. Complete silence followed the confused medley of sounds. Wide-awake now, they strained their ears to catch the faintest, most inarticulate sound; but none came. They crept up the wooden steps, and cautiously pushed up the trap-door. It yielded. Saint-Denys drew his head and shoulders up through the aperture, and looked about him. He beheld a circular room, the same shape and size as the cellar. A narrow open door on the left let in a shaft of light. There was a tiny grated window opposite the door, entirely obscured by dirt and cobwebs. The trap-door was underneath a wooden staircase, and facing it was the hearth in which a few embers were dying out. A table stood in the centre of the room, and there were benches and chairs scattered about the place, and a kind of dresser, littered with mugs and jugs, up against the wall.

Even while Saint-Denys surveyed his surroundings and noted, with a thrill of joy, that the remnants of some kind of rough repast were still scattered on the centre table, he heard the sound of footsteps overhead, also voices. Noiselessly he reclosed the trap-door, and together master and servant crept back into the cellar. The footsteps were coming down the wooden staircase overhead. Three men were talking together, not in the patois, but in French. One of the voices was that of Cottereau, the other was more soft and refined, to Saint-Denys vaguely familiar. The three men came down into the room, and crossed over to the open door. After a few moments the sound of their voices died away. They, too, were apparently gone, and now the place seemed entirely deserted and silent. Saint-Denys and Bunch once more crept up the wooden steps, and gingerly pushed open the trap-door. This time everything was still. Through the narrow doorway a streak of sunshine came searching through the dank, murky atmosphere and touched myriads of dusty atoms each with a spot of gold. Outside a thrush was singing.

On the centre table there was part of a loaf of bread, bits of cheese, water in a jug. Like famished dogs the two adventurers seized on what food there was—remnants neglected by the Chouans, but they tasted good nevertheless, seasoned as they were by ravenous hunger. Above all, they fell on the water, which was sweet and tasted good. "The rascals might have left us a drop of cider," is Lord Saint-Denys's terse comment on this situation. "An English gentleman," he adds farther on, "feeding on the leavings of a pack of groundlings was a sight which would have pleased our democrats." They tore pieces off their shirts and washed one another's wounds, all in absolute silence, with eyes fixed on the open doorway and the newly acquired pistols close to their hands.

Having partially satisfied their hunger and slaked their thirst, they explored their immediate surroundings. Firstly, they peeped out into the open. The tower—for such it certainly was—stood on the crest of a hill with young chestnut and oak covering the slope and forming a screen all round the old building, so that from below probably only the top of it could be seen. Around the tower there was a deep ditch which might be called a moat, more especially as the rough wooden bridge that spanned it could be drawn up at will. The mechanism for this, such as it was, was terribly stiff and out of gear; a primitive contrivance consisting of two cords working on rusty pulleys. But it did not take long for the two men to haul up this improvised drawbridge which, when upright, helped to block up the doorway. They felt more secure now inside the tower, even though light and air only came through the tiny grated window opposite.

Leaving Bunch to his own devices, Martin now climbed the wooden staircase so as to explore the floors above. He came first on a couple of rooms, one leading out of the other. Both the rooms drew a small modicum of air and light through narrow grated loopholes. The first of these rooms was filled with miscellaneous litter: horse-blankets and bits of broken harness, sacks of fodder and trusses of hay; in the second a tumbled truckle bed, and the general untidiness and fustiness of the place testified that someone had slept here overnight. A short iron staircase set in the room itself led to a higher floor. This proved to be the platform of the tower, with broken-down battlemented walls all round it, and gorgeous views over the surrounding country.

Saint-Denys remained for awhile in contemplation of this vast stretch of land into which a wayward Fate and his own caprice had flung him. Some two hundred feet below on his left lay the

village, the scene of last night's many adventures: The *Cabaret du Pélican*, the cottages, the church, the narrow lane where he and Bunch had very nearly found death at the hands of a pack of ignorant fanatics, and then the road, the very spot by the *cabaret* porch where she—Félise—had jumped into the saddle, and he had sprung after her and watched her amble down the village street. And farther on, the grass-covered common where she had halted and listened to him, and he had stood by with his arm round her horse's neck and watched the play of moonlight upon her lovely profile and the strands of golden curls below her hat.

Round the other way the road stretched towards the southwest, where it plunged into an expanse of woodland and presently was lost to view. It was a beautiful spring morning, very different to that other a fortnight ago when he and Bunch had tumbled half dead upon the Biville cliffs, while the storm raged round them, and the booming of the waves came angrily from below. Now the morning sky was blue, the wind just pleasantly boisterous. The woodland still bare of leaves lay like a veil of delicate mauve over valley and hill. A beautiful country, in very truth! Martin's gaze travelled over it with joy. No longer did it seem bleak to him, no longer uninviting. The fate that had thrust him into this one corner of the world rather than any other no longer appeared wayward and obscure. It was Destiny that had its way with him, that had forged every link of the chain which bound him, Martin Saint-Denys, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune, to this lost cause of dispossessed kings, from the moment when, in a mad mood, he had conceived the idea of posting those placards in the streets of London to that when, in a squalid wayside inn of France, he had first set eyes on Félise de Marillac.

How very far did London seem now; its routs and its clubs; its gaming and dancing and flirting; its beautifully-dressed women and exquisite gentlemen! How far, above all, were its disillusionments, its inveterate, unconquerable ennui!

And Martin, skirting the battlemented walls, allowed his gaze to wander round and round, over valley and hill and dim distances veiled by the morning mist. And while he gazed he drew in breath after breath of the clear ozone-laden air, with its mixed odours of the sea and shoals of fish, of wild thyme and wet earth, and its sharp flavour of salt that stung the lips. Between the height on which the tower stood and the wooded hills far away was the valley of the Orne; its blue waters gleamed here and there through the trees whenever they caught a kiss from the morning

sun. On the wooded slope the other side of the valley a grey house with square bastions and sharp-pointed roofs peeped tantalisingly through a tangle of chestnut and beech. It was the same house which Martin had perceived last night when he watched Félise as she rode away. She had turned her mount in that direction, and Saint-Denys knew for certain now that it was her home. He cast longing eyes over the intervening space which lay between hill and hill, and while he did so a wood-pigeon rose from the woodland below, and flew across the valley towards the château.

"Lucky beast!" Martin murmured with a quick, fretful sigh.

Before turning finally to go below, he cast a look in the direction of Soulanges. He saw two men come out by the porch of the *Cabaret du Pélican* and turn into the road away from the village. One of them, of a certainty, was Cottereau; despite the distance there was no mistaking his bulk and slouching gait. He was, as was his wont, talking excitedly to his companion. Both men had muskets over their shoulders. They walked rapidly up the road, and Martin watched them until the stretch of woodland hid them from view.

Martin now lost no more time in dreaming. Quickly he ran down the iron steps and down the wooden staircase. Bunch was waiting patiently for him. An invaluable fellow, Bunch! By his very presence he seemed to put a damper on his master's wandering fancy, to bring him back to the realities of the present as against the unprofitable flight into the might-have-been. He never asked questions, never offered any comment. He was never in a hurry, and never late. Even now, when malevolent eyes might be peering round every corner and malevolent ears be listening, he had waited stolidly until it pleased his lordship to return. A priceless fellow, Bunch! But it was not only the sight of him, so firm, so calm and solid, that caused his master to give a tol-der-o-lol of joy. It was the two bottles which stood so invitingly on the table, the loaf of bread, the sausage.

"Where in Heaven's name did you find these, Bunch?" his lordship asked; but not before he had drunk a full glass of wine—none too sour—and squared his elbows for a solid meal. "Sit down, man, and for God's sake don't stand at attention! I'll choke if you do not join me.

"And what's more," he added, as Bunch appeared quite ready to die rather than sit down to table with his lordship, "we haven't too much time. We are right in the midst of everything here, you know, and I have an idea that within a few hours these cursed papers will be in the hands of the future King of France."

Well knowing that Bunch would not really enjoy his food while he himself was by, he finished his own meal as quickly as possible, and then pushed the wine, the sausage and the bread in front of Bunch, who this time fell to with vigour. It seems that while his lordship was exploring the top of the tower, he, Bunch, had confined his attention to the basement. Finding his tour of the room itself unprofitable, he returned to the cellar, and methodically investigated every likely nook and cranny. He found the two bottles of wine, the bread and sausage carefully hidden behind a bundle of straw.

"You are priceless, you know, Bunch!" his lordship said.

"Yes, my lord."

CHAPTER XXV

MARTIN drew a chair close to the tiny window, and then from his belt he took the wallet which contained, in addition to his money, the papers which Monsieur Legros had so solemnly put into his hand. He had glanced at them from time to time, but until now their contents had not much meaning for him. Names of places, names of people, vague allusions to events had appeared irrelevant at first glance. But now all that was different. Every name of person and place meant something, for he had become familiar with them all. He unfolded the papers and by the feeble light which filtrated through the maze of dirt and cobwebs deciphered their somewhat difficult calligraphy. Here indeed were the familiar names: "*René de Marillac*," "*Félice*," "*Madame la Marquise*," and then again: "*Château de la Villorée*" and "*la vieille Tour*." He searched for an indication of what Cottereau's immediate plans might be, and presently his eyes were arrested by a date, *le 8 Avril*, and the hour *cinq de relevé*. Five o'clock of the morning of the 8th of April, and if he, Martin, was not out in his reckoning, to-day was the 7th of the month. Something obviously had long since been planned for the early hours of to-morrow. Saint-Denys, with a deep frown of concentration on his brow, continued to read. He came on notes, scraps of minute details regarding the progress of a Government coach which plied on certain days between Falaise and Caen with cases containing monies in gold and silver, collected in the various communes by the receiver of taxes. This coach, driven by a Government servant named Gousset and usually escorted by four mounted gendarmes, was to leave Falaise on the morning of the 5th of April. It was to

reach the village of Le Quesnay on the evening of the 7th, and start again on its way in the small hours of the 8th. Midway between Le Quesnay and Soulanges lies the wood of Glatigny. There followed instructions for an attack on the coach in the Glatigny wood at *cinq heures de relevé*. Thirty men in all were to carry this attack through under the command of Cottereau. Their names were here listed, and apparently every one of those thirty men had received his written instructions. Orders were to take no prisoners and not to leave a single "*bleu*" alive. There was also reference to various places where muskets or other fire-arms could be stored, and to the amount of bullion which would probably be found in the cases, as well as other matters not altogether understandable to one outside Cottereau's nefarious councils. But the whole scheme was there, elaborated by a master hand, a scheme which did in very truth, if blown upon or unsuccessful, involve the honour of the Royal family of France.

The name of René de Marillac appeared at frequent intervals, that of Félice once or twice with advice not to trust her too far. The stolen money was to be stored in the cellars of the *vieille Tour*, and the only one seemingly who was to be kept in ignorance of this dastardly enterprise was the unfortunate Duc de Berry himself . . . until afterwards.

"When I had finished examining the papers," Lord Saint-Denys goes on to relate in his "Indiscretions," "I put them away in the wallet and tucked everything carefully into my belt; obviously the monition of my beloved—for thus did I already think of her—to lose no time, had come none too soon. She told me that her brother would tarry at the *Cabaret du Pélican*, but that was last night. Many hours had gone by since then and I had less than the day in which to find the Duc de Berry, to warn him of what was afoot, and if possible to get him out of the way of being involved in this shameful business.

"I called to Bunch. We picked up our muskets and bandoliers and fixed the pistols in our belts, then between us we lowered the drawbridge. I gazed out upon the landscape which had already become so familiar to me, so familiar and withal so full of mysteries. It seemed to hold all the secrets which I now felt I would give my very life to discover. From where I stood I could trace the steep and narrow path which, winding in and out between the trees, led down from the tower to the confines of the village. Most of the path was hidden from view by the trees, but there was a point midway down the slope when it was clearly visible from where I stood, for a length of a hundred yards or so. My

intention had been to start immediately for the village, and from thence to get on the track of René de Marillac, when all at once my attention was arrested by a group of men moving along that visible stretch of the path. Among them I at once recognised the tall figure of Cottereau; the other I thought might easily be young de Marillac; the third was shorter and stouter than either of the others. The three of them came to a halt at a point where I could easily see them, even though the intervening distance was too great for me to distinguish their actions very clearly. Cottereau, as usual, was talking volubly and gesticulating with both arms. All at once he put one knee to the ground, and in truth I nearly gave a cry of amazement at what I saw then. The short man stretched out his hand and Cottereau, still kneeling, bent his head and kissed it! I would have been a fool had I not guessed at once that this could be none other than the Duc de Berry. Was Fate intending to play into my hands after all? Had I come to the end of my quest at last, and would Destiny be gentle enough to allow me to work from to-day onwards for the furtherance of my own happiness? Everything did indeed point that way, for a moment or two later the short man and the other who, I was sure now, was in truth René de Marillac, turned and started to walk up the slope, while Cottereau stood and watched them until a turn in the path hid them from his view and mine. I could have cried out in jubilation. In less than half an hour, even if they walked very slowly, I should be face to face with the Duc de Berry, and whatever opposition I encountered from young de Marillac he could not prevent my placing into the Duke's hands the papers which had been entrusted to me by Monsieur Legros. Thus one part of my oath would be fulfilled; the other would follow as a natural consequence, for, once the Duc de Berry trusted me, he would of his own accord keep me by his side.

"All then seemed well, when suddenly from somewhere on the slope there rose the cry of the screech-owl, that horrible sound which I had learned to detest beyond every other sound in heaven or earth. And in one moment the whole of that cursed piece of woodland was swarming with men. I don't suppose there were more than a score, perhaps two dozen altogether, but it was the way they seemed to come to the surface like a lot of foxes out of their lairs that roused me to fury. A moment ago I thought to find myself at the end of my quest. I had the Duc de Berry in sight, and felt that all I would have to do would be to pit my powers of persuasion against those of René de Marillac; but now, though I could actually see no one, I could hear furtive sounds all round

me, naked feet treading the ground, forms moving under the brushwood, and the crackling of twigs. Men had indeed sprung out of the very bowels of the earth, not only as a rear-guard of the Duke but also in the van. And the orders were that I was to be shot on sight.

"That's all right, my friend Cottereau," I said to myself, 'but there's going to be no shooting till after your future King knows a little something about the methods which you propose to employ in order to set him on his throne, and if he is the man I take him to be he won't like your brigandage and highway robbery, no prisoners taken and all the rest of your dirty bag of tricks.'

"I called to Bunch, who—priceless fellow—had already cleared away the remnants of our meal. There was nothing for it but to lie in hiding and wait for an opportunity. At one moment I thought of making a dash for the open, but that would have been madness with all those foxes sneaking out of their burrows, and I also preferred the idea of being under the same roof as the Duke, and thus not losing sight of him again. The cellar did not commend itself to me for that purpose. I hate the idea of being trapped underground like a rat. In the meanwhile, though the Chouans were as noiseless as any wild beast on the prowl, I was conscious of their approach. Thank Heaven we had lowered the drawbridge before they came, or they would have known that there was someone in the tower and we would of a surety have been discovered. There was now no time to think. As soundlessly as we could we ran up the wooden stairs, and then up the iron one to the platform above. Here, as I remarked to Bunch, there was always the possibility of taking a header into the declivity below and of getting away even then with one's life.

"The iron stairs gave direct on the platform. There was no door or masonry of any kind to mask the aperture, and it was therefore impossible to watch from this point what went on downstairs as one would, of a certainty, be seen from below. We had therefore to trust to our ears. There was a good deal of movement going on, and some talking. After a moment or two we heard footsteps coming up the stairs. I made a shrewd guess that they were those of the Duc de Berry and René de Marillac. They went together into the room just below us and remained talking for a few minutes, at the end of which I heard young de Marillac bid the Duke adieu and then go downstairs again. More furtive movements down below, and then, peeping over the parapet, I saw de Marillac cross the drawbridge, followed by half a dozen men, and walk rapidly down the path. At a rough computation eight or

ten men must have remained in the ground-floor room, as body-guard for the Duke. Two of them I perceived pulling up the drawbridge. After that everything became very still. The men were below; the Duc de Berry in his room. My opportunity had come at last.

"In the course of years the floor of the platform had covered itself with earth and weeds and thus was quite noiseless under my feet. I crept to the head of the stairs and peeped down into the room below. The Duke was sitting on the bed. He had a book in his hand, which looked like a missal or a breviary, and appeared absorbed in reading. I had always understood that the Bourbons were devout Catholics, and I felt that it was a good augury that my presence should become known to him while he was engaged in prayer. The communicating door between the two rooms was, unfortunately, wide open. However, that, of course, could not be helped. It might make matters a little more difficult, that was all. I next tied the ring which Monsieur Legros had given me to a corner of my handkerchief and allowed the whole thing to dangle down the stairway. I moved it about gently until the ring struck the nearest iron step with a soft click. The Duke looked up, jumped up from his bed and gave a quick loud call: '*Qui va là?*' This, of course, I had expected and was prepared for what must prove a race for life or death between me and the men below. Already I could hear them scrambling for the stairs. I had less than thirty seconds in which to run down the iron steps, thrust the ring in the Duke's hand and whisper in his ear: 'I come from Legros. Send the men away.'

"I must say that here he behaved like a Bourbon and a gentleman. He thrust me down on the floor behind the bed, threw a horse-blanket over me, then lay down on the bed. I imagine that he took up his book again and pretended to read. All I could hear was the patter of naked feet on the stairs. They came to a halt in the outer room, and I heard the Duke's voice asking coolly: '*Qu'est-ce-qu'il y a?*' The answer I did not catch. There was a kind of soft murmur and then the Duke said impatiently: '*Mais non, mais non!* I was calling loudly to the saints to pray for us all in our difficulties,' and then he added: 'Leave me in peace now; I want rest and prayer.'

"More murmurings and soft patter of retreating feet; then silence once again. Less than two minutes later all the papers entrusted to me by Monsieur Legros in London were in the hands of the future King of France. What followed would now rest with him."

CHAPTER XXVI

It was in very truth a solemn moment when in the narrow, squalid, unswept room of the old tower, Martin Saint-Denys placed that packet of papers in the hands of the Duc de Berry. He makes very little of it in his "Indiscretions," but it was a solemn moment nevertheless, and in its way very curious. Less than twenty-four hours ago, he seemed at an immeasurably long distance from his goal. For fifteen days he and his faithful Bunch had tramped along the highways and by-ways of Normandy on what, indeed, seemed at times like a fool's quest. To find a man one had never seen in a country one did not know, harassed by suspicion, encompassed by enmity, would to most men have seemed an impossible task. Not so to a gambler playing with chance, an adventurer and a sportsman. Not so above all to Martin Saint-Denys who, in addition to redeeming a solemn oath, was in quest of the one woman who came up to his ideal of beauty and of charm.

Strange how the nearness of Félice seemed suddenly to have smoothed out the path which led to the fulfilment of his promise. For fifteen days he had tried to come on the track of Monseigneur, and on the fifteenth day he seemed as far off his goal as on the day when he landed under the cliffs at Biville. Less than twenty-four hours ago he had looked upon Time as his invincible enemy. Then last night he had spoken to Félice, had touched her hand, had confided in her and lo! every difficulty just melted away like ice beneath the sun.

And here he was, standing in the presence of the heir to the throne of France, and the first part of his promise to Legros was fulfilled. All that was left for him to do now was to stand by the Duc de Berry and see him safely on his way to England. With characteristic optimism Saint-Denys had no need to assure himself that this would be an easy task. Of a truth the adventure for which he had offered to pay £5,000 had proved to be well worth the money. It had been thrilling, joyous, spirit-stirring: boredom had fled on the wings of a passionate quixotism: and the best was still to come.

Who shall blame the adventurer now that he once more indulged in his day-dreams? that he forgot the man he was, and only thought of Félice? the gambler, the penniless wastrel dared to dream of requited love. Monseigneur was busy with Cottereau's papers. Discreetly Martin tiptoed into the next room which in its turn communicated directly with the well of the stairs. Down below the Chouans were on the watch. Martin could hear them

stealthily moving about: now and again a word or two—always in whispers—came to his ear. He could not catch what the men said, but knew well enough that from this hour—this minute perhaps—the adventure itself would resolve itself into a fight for the possession of the person of Monseigneur le Duc de Berry: a fight in which he, Martin, stood an even chance of losing his life. But for Bunch he wouldn't have cared one jot. God in His heaven had taught him the meaning of love. Even if nothing more ever came of it—nothing ever could come of it—even if Fate decreed, as it obviously had, that his day-dreams would never be fulfilled, even so it had been well worth while. Save in the days when he had followed the Scarlet Pimpernel, and in the wake of that beloved chief had ridden across France with some unfortunate woman or child huddled in his arms, he had never felt that life was worth while, until last night when he stood beside Félise de Marillac and felt the thrill of desire for a perfect mate.

The Duc de Berry had waited for a moment or two until he was sure that Saint-Denys had discreetly left him and taken his stand in the outer room. He then sat down on the edge of the bed, and soon became absorbed in the perusal of the papers which the Englishman had placed in his hands.

In addition to a long list of the principal adherents to the royal cause who could be relied on to take up arms in Normandy, the papers chiefly consisted of elaborate details of plans for obtaining money for carrying on the guerrilla campaign against Bonaparte. They were plans for robbing stage coaches, waylaying travellers known to be carrying money, murder even where supplies were not freely given up. Even before he had read through one half of these abominable documents Monseigneur was forced to realise that the man Cateran whom he trusted was little less than a criminal, ambitious and unscrupulous, ready to bring disgrace upon the Royal house of France with his tortuous methods, so long as he attained the cheap glory which he coveted of being the king-maker and leader of men. And when first he realised all that the Duke's indignation was certainly very great. The idea that his name should be involved in a series of vulgar crimes, which if detected and brought home to their perpetrators would bring the future King of France inside a court of justice designed for vulgar malefactors, and if successful would for ever brand the Royal House of Bourbon with the mark of shame which could not be contemplated dispassionately. Accustomed as he was by his upbringing to control all outward expressions of feeling, Monseigneur felt

thankful that milor had been sufficiently discreet to turn his back, while he himself gave vent to his bitter resentment by a few muttered oaths, by the flush on his face and the clenching of his fists.

But, alas, this scion of a noble race could not be reckoned as a hero among men. He was indignant, of course, and no doubt at the moment his intention was quite firm to turn his back for ever on Cottereau and his horde of brigands. But with that indignation in his heart there was also a great deal of irresolution. Indeed, irresolution had always been his principal characteristic, as alas! it had been that of his ill-fated uncle, Louis XVI.

And not only irresolution, but a goodly modicum of fear.

Even before he had finished perusing all the papers, the flush on his face had given place to a greyish pallor, and beads of moisture came out upon his high forehead. His hands beat mechanically one against the other; he thrust the papers in the inside pocket of his coat, took them out again, and then thrust them back. His somewhat shifty eyes sought through the open doorway the resolute, uncompromising back of his English friend, and he gave a quick sigh, partly of envy and partly of impatience.

Some few minutes went by; then suddenly he called softly: "Milor!"

In a moment Saint-Denys was by his side.

"At Monseigneur's service!" he said.

He remained standing under the lintel, a fine figure of an English gentleman, tall, with strong, athletic limbs, which in every movement suggested power, and a straight, wide brow which proclaimed determination, courage and all those attributes which were lacking in this descendant of kings.

For a moment of two longer Saint-Denys thus stood in the doorway waiting for the Duke to speak, regarding him with immense compassion. Fate had evidently destined this young man for an easy life of pleasure. Every line of brow and mouth and chin showed weakness, love of ease and sybaritic pleasure; the eyes were a trifle shifty, the lips full and lax, the hands white and womanish in shape. Somehow to Martin the face appeared vaguely familiar. There was a likeness here which he tried in vain to recapture. On the whole a good-looking face, but with nothing in it to suggest a leader of men or a master of his own destiny. At the moment, in spite of his obvious and very just indignation, his whole attitude was one of irresolution, of a man accustomed to look to a stronger will for guidance in a crisis. He pulled the papers once

more out of his pocket, fumbled with them, glanced up at Saint-Denys and then down again, made as if to rise, then sat down once more. At last he said :

"Will you close the door, milor, and come and sit beside me? We shall not be interrupted, and must talk all this over quietly. I—I am half bewildered. But—let me see," he went on, as Saint-Denys, having closed the communicating door, came across the room and sat down as desired beside him on the bed. "Your name is Saint-Denys? Lord Saint-Denys?"

"At your service."

"And these papers which you have given me . . . you know their contents?"

"Yes. Monsieur Legros desired me to read them."

"Monsieur Legros? Ah, yes! I was forgetting. Monsieur Legros then gave you these papers and desired you to read them?"

"Yes."

"There is also a letter from him to me."

"A sealed letter, Monseigneur."

"Yes. I know. In it he tells me your name and who you are. He also speaks of your generosity in undertaking the mission which he entrusted to you. I am deeply, eternally grateful, milor."

The word "eternal" as applied to Royal gratitude brought a smile of quiet irony to Martin's lips; but all he said was, "My thanks are due to Monsieur Legros for suggesting so happy an adventure."

The Duke shrugged.

"Happy?" he said in a tone of intense bitterness. "And you just call it an adventure to open the eyes of a future King of France to the abyss of infamy into which he was plunging headlong? Do you English never take anything seriously?"

"If I was wrong in calling it an adventure," Saint-Denys retorted with a pleasant smile, "Monseigneur will forgive me, but I still insist on calling it happy."

To this the Duke made no reply. He sat in silence for a moment or two, whilst Saint-Denys could not help but note how very marked became the look of indecision, not to say of fear in the young man's face.

At last he said, staring straight out before him :

"They all wish me to return to England . . ."

It was a feeble, backboneless kind of remark, uttered in a feeble, toneless voice. Martin vaguely wondered who "they all" might be.

"I understood," he said, "from Monsieur Legros that His Majesty himself . . ."

"Yes, yes! that's what I mean," the Duke broke in, and looked rather queerly at Martin.

"And I promised Monsieur Legros that I would not leave Monseigneur's side until you were safely on your way back to England."

"But how can I go, milor? I, too, have promised . . ."

"What, Monseigneur?"

"That I would tarry here until . . ." He paused.

Martin waited, wondering what was in his mind, but the Duke's glance wandered, would not meet his, eye to eye.

"I promised Cottereau," he murmured at last.

"Not a binding promise, Monseigneur," Saint-Denys declared.

"No, I know."

"Well, then?"

"We could not get away from here without arousing those men downstairs. . . ."

"They wouldn't dare touch your Highness."

"No, but they would follow me. They have orders . . ."

Nothing but the innate respect which every English gentleman feels for a Royal house—his own or foreign, reigning or in exile—prevented Martin Saint-Denys from showing the impatience which he felt in face of so much irresolution, such obvious infirmity of purpose. The man was a moral coward, that was evident, though not a physical one. His actions proved this, since he had not hesitated to leave the shelter of his English home in order to plunge headlong into unknown adventures and brave Bonaparte's police who were on the look-out for him and were reckoned among the most astute and most unscrupulous in the world. But moral cowardice is often more difficult to combat than the physical kind, especially when respect for the personage stays one's hands and forces a curb on one's tongue.

"Monseigneur," Martin said with deep earnestness and with all the firmness which he hoped would put some backbone into this weakling, "will you allow me to escort you now—at once—to the nearest place where we can obtain horses so that you may reach the coast with the least possible delay?"

The Duc de Berry slowly shook his head.

"But that is impossible, milor," he said.

"Why not? I pray you forgive me, but why not?"

"If we walked down those stairs, the men would shoot you on sight."

"Not in your Highness's presence."

"Oh, yes. Cottereau's orders, you see."

"Yes, I see!" Saint-Denys retorted grimly. "But even so they would not dare touch your Highness."

"No . . . but without you I . . ."

"I will look after myself. If your Highness will go out by the door I will find my way through the window and will wait on your Highness at whatever spot you will deign to appoint."

But the Duke once more shook his head in that doleful manner which so irritated the impetuous Martin.

"But, milor," he said, "can't you see that there is the impasse beyond which we cannot get, even if you had wings and could fly to my side? . . . There are always these men about me with orders to stand by me wherever I may go, and also with orders to shoot you on sight."

"Your Highness could order them not to follow you."

"I could, of course, and equally, of course, they would obey. I could order them back to their burrows and they would all disappear as if the earth had swallowed them up. Nevertheless, the moment you came nigh me there would come a shot from somewhere out of the earth seemingly, and——You may not believe me, milor, I know you English are adventurous and reckless, but I have seen too many tragedies of that sort to willingly risk yet another."

The young man paused. Martin could not help but admit that he was right. The capacity of these Chouans for burrowing in the earth was nothing short of miraculous.

"Your Highness, then, is a prisoner?" he remarked.

"To all intents and purposes, yes."

"In that case," Saint-Denys declared gaily, "we must all do a flit together."

"That, of course, is out of the question. No, no! you have more than fulfilled your promise, milor, taken risks for me, who am nothing to you. But no promise is binding that involves the certainty—not the possibility, mind you, the certainty—of death. Nor, to put it bluntly, would your death benefit me." And for a second or two the ghost of a smile flitted across the pleasant face of the Duc de Berry. "You could not be of service to me, milor, if one of those fanatics put a bullet into you."

"Oh, there would still be Bunch," Martin said lightly.

"Bunch?"

"My servant, Monseigneur, a priceless pearl. If I fell by the way he would carry on. He is up there waiting for me. He is excellent in contriving a means for descending unseen from the top of a tower. With your Highness's permission, he will at once show you his skill in that line."

The great thing was evidently not to allow the young prince to think. There was just the chance of carrying him off his feet, always reckoning on the fact that physically the man was no coward, and could be led along into any perilous adventure that did not entail his facing the irascible Cottereau. He was very obviously and very really frightened of the Chouan leader, not so much of him as a man as of his influence over him. His indignation against him was aroused. He wanted to rid himself of the influence, hated the very idea of all those turpitudes planned and accomplished in his name, but in his heart of hearts he knew that if he came face to face with Cottereau the man would persuade him that the very papers which he had under his own eyes were nothing but forgeries concocted by the spies of Bonaparte.

It was because Saint-Denys realised all this that he was determined to carry this ductile prince quite literally off his feet. Softly he called to Bunch, who at once came tiptoeing down the stairs. Out of the litter in the other room master and servant set to work immediately to collect a miscellany of horse-blankets and bridle reins, leather straps and bits of rope, all of which Martin thrust into Bunch's arms.

"Now get to work on these, Bunch," he said, "and be quick about it. The three of us must be off this crow's nest in less than five minutes. Work away as if you had the devil at your heels, and you probably have. But for God's sake make no noise, and remember that there's a window on the floor below."

It was never necessary to reiterate orders such as those to Mr. Bunch. Armed with the loot, he had already scrambled back to the platform.

"We'll give him three minutes, Monseigneur," his lordship said gaily, "and in five we'll have given your unwanted escort the slip."

He was pleased to see that the Duke had already shed some of his apathy. He had risen to his feet and, making as little noise as possible, was pacing up and down the narrow room as if to give vent to his impatience. His eyes were glowing: there was a flush on his cheeks. The excitement of the coming adventure had thrilled him and sent the good old blood of the Bourbons coursing more rapidly through his veins. Saint-Denys had indeed been right in his estimate of him. The future King of France was no coward physically.

"Which is our first object, Monseigneur?" Martin asked.

"Where do we get horses?"

"At La Villorée, of course."

"At La V——?"

Had the heavens fallen? Did Martin's ears deceive him? Horses at La Villorée! La Villorée! He was going to La Villorée in the company of the Duc de Berry! He would see Félise! He would—— But no, no! No thinking of that just now. A clear head, a logical brain were vital to the success of this next phase of his exciting adventures. But heavens above! what had he done that Fate should be so kind? He must have looked extremely foolish at this moment, standing stark still and blinking as if something had hit him on the head. He pulled himself together when he felt the Duke's eyes fixed wonderingly upon him.

"La Villorée?" he murmured somewhat inarticulately. "Oh! ah, yes!"

"You are acquainted with Madame la Marquise, milor?" the Duke asked.

"Oh, yes, Monseigneur," Martin stammered; "that is . . . yes . . ."

"Madame always keeps a pair of horses and her coach in readiness for me at the château. Her servants are at my disposal. I do not trust all of them, but there is old Pierre. He drives me when I have need of him, but I shall have to lie *perdu* for a day and a night at least, till arrangements can be made at Arromanches or Calvaert with an English ship on which I can embark."

Saint-Denys was on the point of vowing that nothing would please him better than to lie *perdu* at La Villorée for an indefinite time, but he was more sober now. He knew that Bunch had not shirked his work and that he had made full preparations for a rapid, if somewhat adventurous, exit from the old tower.

"I assured his Highness," his lordship says in the sixteenth chapter of his "Indiscretions," "that I was entirely at his service, and then followed him up the iron steps to the platform above. As I surmised, Bunch had completed his preparations. There was a line of way ready for us dangling from one of the battlements at a height of some sixty feet or so from the bed of the moat. It was made up of horse-blankets knotted together by their corners, and further lengthened by leather straps and bits of rope. Precarious, methought, if the Prince showed any nervousness, but it was the best that could be done.

"As I could not leave the Duke's side, I sent Bunch down first. This had the advantage of being fair, as he was responsible for the safety of our means of exit. He slid down the line into the depths with the ease of a merryman sliding down a greasy pole. I longed to shout down approval at him. The bed of the moat unfortunately was very soggy, and the poor fellow had a rather

unhappy time down there while he scrambled up the opposite side. He had the end of his line wound round his arm. When he reached firm ground again he fastened this end securely round a tree. The line of way lay now at a steep angle, and everything being ready, the Prince in his turn swung himself over the battlement.

"I must say that I admired the way he did this, without any hint of nervousness, and let himself gingerly down the extremely precarious line. Bunch was waiting for him at the other end, and presently I had the satisfaction of seeing the future King of France fall panting, but safe, in the arms of my faithful Bunch.

"It was my turn now. While I was watching the hope of the Bourbons risking his life in an endeavour to escape from the thralldom of an importunate fanatic, I had heard certain sounds proceeding from the interior of the tower, sounds which gave me the idea that something had aroused the suspicion of his over-zealous guard. In fact, it had seemed to me for the past few seconds that I heard the wooden staircase creak under heavy feet. Fortunately, after I had ransacked the outer room for the material necessary for our escape, I had taken the precaution of closing the communicating door, but even so . . .

"In truth, I was thankful when I saw the Duke safely landed and in Bunch's arms, for I could then mount the parapet and take my turn on the hazardous line. I knew I should not have much time before me, for not only was I sure that two men at least had reached the outer room, but I distinctly heard—as everything around me was very still—a discreet knock at the communicating door. I swung myself over the battlement and grasped the line firmly with my knees, and this I succeeded in doing at the very moment when the communicating door was softly being pushed open. I could hear it creaking on its rusty hinges.

"There was not sufficient time now for me to attempt the descent. I should have been caught half-way, and if the men had their muskets with them, which was likely, that would indeed have been the end of Martin Saint-Denys, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune. So I clung with one hand to a projection in the masonry and with my knees to the horse-blanket. With my other hand I drew my loaded pistol from my belt. A few very unpleasant seconds went by, I could hear the men coming up the iron steps. On the spur of the moment I supposed that the suspicion did not cross their mind that the Duke had actually gone. The idea in itself would have seemed too preposterous for them, but they were evidently anxious and came up to see if he was on the platform

and safe. There were two of them. I could not see them, of course, but I heard the patter of their naked feet on the iron steps. They came out on the platform. I imagine they looked round : one, one way, the other the other. Now I could see them through the space between the battlements. They had realised that the Duke was not there. One of them turned, obviously to call his mates. The other came towards me. I fired once, and then again. I could not, of course, aim accurately. One man fell immediately. I had to fire a third time before the other rolled down upon the floor.

"There was a scramble in the tower down below. I recommended my soul to God and let myself go down as rapidly as ever possible. Bunch, I am glad to say, had the good sense to drag the Duc de Berry under cover of the undergrowth. I was down and away under the trees at the moment when I saw half a dozen heads appear over the battlemented walls."

CHAPTER XXVII

NEVER in all his life, declared his lordship afterwards, had he felt such exhilaration as he did during that scrambling down the wooded slope into the valley of the Orne, with the river murmuring below, the breeze stirring the naked branches of the trees, with the twittering of birds all round him, and the tang of spring whipping up his blood.

"We were three joyous adventurers now," he says, "and the future King of France was as merry as any of us. He was like a schoolboy escaped from school. He knew every inch of the ground and guided us unerringly. Whether the Chouans followed us or not I cannot say; I presume they did, but we certainly had the start of them, and I think we were more nimble on our feet.

"What the state of my mind was when first I beheld the château in its entirety I cannot put into words. It seemed to me like a fairy place, and I am not sure that I did not expect to see a host of heavenly angels soaring round it, to guard my beloved from every ill. In reality La Villorée is a very fine example of French mediæval architecture. We have nothing quite like it in England, because our people at that period were not so open to attack by rival noblemen, set on filching one another's estates. The four bastions at the angles of the château suggested a fortress rather than a dwelling-place, but what it lacked in homeliness it certainly gained in picturesqueness and romance. Nestling in a bower of young chestnut and oak just bursting into leaf, it towered

above the valley with its pointed tiled roof rising sharply above its battlements.

"There was no bridge over the Orne anywhere in sight, but the Duc de Berry led us to the ford, distant less than a mile up the river. This we crossed, then came back along the road till we reached the great gates of the château. They were not locked, and we passed through them and made our way up the terraced gardens. Except for the twitter of birds, absolute silence reigned around us. No sound came from the château. The *volets* and some of the windows were open, and it was seemingly inhabited; but not a sound! It was as if we had stepped into the enchanted gardens of the Palace of the Sleeping Beauty. And all at once I was conscious of the first sense of melancholy which I had experienced since the happy moment when I realised that I was about to see my beloved again. It was not so much the wilderness of overgrown paths, the broken statuary and balustrades, the general air of neglect and decay, which had so suddenly damped my spirits, but rather an atmosphere of sadness and desolation which I had seen reflected in the lines of sorrow round Félice's exquisite mouth. It was the clumps of dying and dead roses, the withered shrubs, the few half-starved iris and violets that poked their timid heads through the rank grass which made me think of all the tears that that lonely young girl must have shed before the joy of youth had given place to womanly earnestness.

"Up the several terraces we climbed, till we came to the actual grille of the château. It was of delicately wrought iron, and at one time had been gilt, but now it showed the same signs of decay and neglect as the garden. But by this time my heart was beating so furiously that I doubt if my first impressions of La Villorée were in any way correct. The Duc de Berry had commanded Bunch to pull the heavy chain of a bell which hung by the grille. The dull, broken clang echoed through the silent château. Peeping through the grille, I caught sight of a vast hall with marble columns and exquisite capitals of ormolu, a grand marble staircase opposite, and pieces of furniture and pictures on the walls covered against the dust. After a minute or two we heard the approach of shuffling footsteps, and a few seconds later an old man came across the hall toward the grille. As soon as he caught sight of the Duke he threw up his hands, exclaiming: 'Monseigneur!' His old face beamed with wonderful joy and tears started to trickle down his cheeks. I verily believe that the next moment he would have fallen on his knees and kissed the Duke's hand, which was grasping a bit of the ironwork and shaking the gate with much vigour.

"The Duke, however, was not eager for demonstrations of loyalty at this moment. What he wanted—and so did all of us—was safety from any possible pursuit by those cursed Chouans. He ordered the old man forthwith to unlock the grille, and then desired him to appraise Madame la Marquise of his arrival. As for me, I had but one thought, and that was Félise. I longed to be free from all conventions and etiquette, so that I might rush off on my own and wander through this enchanted palace seeking for the exquisite Sleeping Beauty, the Princess of my dreams, until I found myself within her inner chamber. But at this point my imagination came to a halt. The vision which it had conjured up was not one for a wastrel, a ruined gambler like myself, to dwell on with any hope."

CHAPTER XXVIII

It was just past midday when the Duc de Berry accompanied by Lord Saint-Denys and Mr. Jeremiah Bunch arrived at the château de la Villorée. As his lordship states in his Memoirs he had but a very confused recollection of his first impressions. Madame la Marquise presently came down the great marble stairs, advancing in stately magnificence, somewhat like a ship in full sail. Saint-Denys thought of Drake and the Spanish Armada. Thus must have appeared King Philip's galleons to the eyes of the English admiral. There was a great deal of talking and much ceremony while the necessary presentation was made, and the Duke was thereafter conducted to a living-room, where he and Saint-Denys were served with wine and a collation, Bunch being left to the care of the old man, who was addressed by Madame as Matthieu.

Madame deigned to remember that she had seen him at the *Chat qui Saute*, and the Duke in a few short words told her of the papers which his lordship had placed in his hands.

"I will show them to you later, Marquise," he said. "They will surprise and shock you. All I can say for the moment is that we shall have to revise our policy considerably, a matter which I shall be able to discuss with my uncle as soon as I am in England."

He said not a word about the time he spent in the old tower, nor of the means whereby he was enabled to escape from his Argus-eyed watchdogs. Indeed, it was very characteristic of this fast-dwindling type of royal personage that the future King of France, now that he felt himself in comparative safety and presumably in congenial company, seemed tacitly to relegate his lordship

into the position of an outsider. During the frugal meal which followed and which was served by old Matthieu in an adjoining room, his Royal Highness talked volubly and intimately with Madame. He showed her the papers which Saint-Denys had brought over from England and placed in his hands at risk of his life. He talked of Cottereau and his infamous schemes, called Heaven to witness what a disaster it would have been if the Royal house of Bourbon had been involved in a case of highway robbery. "It might have meant a vulgar charge before the local police!" Madame exclaimed with hands and eyes turned up to the ceiling. But there was little, if any, reference to the one man who had averted this disaster, and hardly a word of gratitude. The first warm impulse which had caused the Prince to use the words, "I am eternally grateful," had already given place to that sense of the divine right of kings to exact loyalty, obedience, self-sacrifice as their due.

But what in the name of all that was wonderful did Martin Saint-Denys care? For Félise de Marillac was sitting at table opposite to him. When first she came into the room and she had made her obeisance before His Royal Highness she had held out her hand to him, and Martin, the happiest of men, had kissed that beautiful pale hand of hers, as soft and warm as a bird, resting for one instant in his. After that she sat down demurely and listened while the others talked. From where he sat Martin could feast his eyes upon her beauty and marvel how soon the time would come when he could bring a smile to her lips. The whole story of the papers, of Cottereau's plans, of the terrible plight from which the future King of France—aye!—and the entire Royal house of Bourbon had escaped as by a miracle, was retold for her benefit. But when the meal was over, the last word spoken, and the Duc de Berry and Madame had sailed out of the room, she looked at Martin and said slowly:

"Shall we ever be able to repay what we owe you, milor?"

"I am more than repaid already, mademoiselle," he murmured in reply.

They were all back in the boudoir and coffee was being served. The Duke had evidently overheard Félise's generous words, for he said airily:

"Ah! how right you are, mademoiselle. Milor Saint-Denys was indeed most helpful, and I will see to it myself that His Majesty hears of it. Indeed, but for his lordship I should never have known the extent of Cottereau's knavery."

"Unfortunate man!" Félise said with a sigh, "but in reality

Monseigneur Jacques Cottereau is not a knave : a fanatic and misguided, but his loyalty is beyond question."

"You defend him, mademoiselle?"

"With your permission, Monseigneur. I am sorry for the man, for I feel that there is a tragedy looming ahead for him."

"Oh, he'll end on the gallows all right enough," the Duke remarked dryly, "he and the pack of fools whom he leads by the nose."

"My brother René, Monseigneur."

"Oh! Ah, yes, that good boy! I hadn't thought of him. He, too, is entirely under the thumb of our friend Cottereau. And, by the way, where is he?"

"He was with your Royal Highness surely?" Madame la Marquise put in.

"Not since this morning. He escorted me part of the way to the tower, then he and Cottereau went off to attend to their own business. I didn't know at the time what that business was. I didn't ask, but I know now. That infernal scheme to rob the coach——"

In a moment Madame was on her feet.

"Heavens above!" she exclaimed; and forgetting her courtly manners, she began pacing up and down the room like a caged lioness, "if René is with Cottereau . . ."

Félice had uttered no cry like her mother, but Martin saw a scared look creep into her eyes and her face now was white to the lips.

"Well, I hope he won't get mixed up with that knavery," his Royal Highness said with real concern in his tone of voice, "for your sake, Marquise, as well as his own."

"And now," he went on after a short pause during which Madame made heroic efforts to control her agitation, "I would like, with your permission, to take a short rest, after which we can discuss the arrangements for my journey to England. I hope, milor," he said, turning to Saint-Denys, "that we can journey together; that is, if it suits your convenience. As for myself, Madame la Marquise will, I know, have the goodness to send a courier to our friend Caron at Calvaert. He is a fine rogue, milor, who does a deal of smuggling between your country and mine, but outwardly a most respectable man and a receiver of taxes for the usurper's coffers. He will, for a consideration, find me an English ship that will convey me safely across the Channel. Is that not so, Marquise?"

"It is just as Monseigneur says," Madame replied somewhat

vaguely, for obviously her thoughts were elsewhere, pursuing her son on his nefarious course. "I will send a courier over to Calvaert at once. Until then . . ."

"I will be your guest, Madame," His Highness deigned to say, "and right glad will I be to sleep in a comfortable bed and to pass a razor over my chin."

How futile, how paltry, how unutterably stupid it all seemed! That young man with his airs and graces of royalty, his condescending ways, his utterly callous selfishness! To think of him as a man for whom others were ready to lay down their lives! Martin thought of Cottereau, and could not help comparing the fanaticism of the one with the supineness of the other. Cottereau with all his faults, which certainly did amount to crimes, was, at any rate, a man: rough, uncouth, savage, but a man. Now this young Prince was no coward either: his impulses were brave and generous, but his upbringing had made a weakling of him, and the traditions in which he was reared of the sacrosanct status of kings had warped his mind and bred a veritable hydra of selfishness.

"May I have the honour, Monseigneur . . . ?" the Marquise said before she escorted the Prince to the door. Truly, thought Martin, she was wonderful, for even he, a stranger, could see that she was in a state of terrible anxiety over her son. Ever since she had learned that he was not with the Duke, but had gone off with Cottereau, she had seemed almost beside herself. Her parchment-like face was the colour of ashes, her lips entirely bloodless, and her thin white hands, fidgeting with a handkerchief, nearly tore it to shreds. But except for these signs which she could not control she never lost her dignity, or the respect inborn in every French aristocrat which she owed to her exalted guest. She was going to show him to his room, and walked with her usual firm and upright carriage to the door.

"Will you honour my poor house also, milor?" she said, turning graciously to Martin; and then to her daughter she said, "Wait here for me, Félise."

Martin, perforce, had willy nilly to follow. Madame led the way into the room where they had dined. Matthieu was there busy with clearing away the plates and silver. There were two lighted candles on a side table. The room was vast and stately, with fine walnut panelling of the Louis XIII period. A monumental mantelpiece, also of carved walnut, adorned almost the whole of one wall. Madame walked up to it and touched a portion of the carving, whereupon the panel nearest to it slowly and noiselessly

moved on invisible hinges and disclosed a stairhead leading into darkness below. Matthieu now picked up the two candles and, at Madame's command, preceded the Duke down a flight of stairs. Martin at Madame's invitation followed. As soon as the three men had gone down a few steps, the panel up above once more slid into place.

Three underground rooms opening on a square vestibule and sparsely lighted by loopholes in the ceiling were placed at the disposal of the Duc de Berry and his lordship. The Duke apparently had been here before, for at once he made himself quite at home. "We are safe here for a few days, milor," he said as he graciously indicated to Martin a small room beside his own, "but I hope it won't be for long. Caron is an amiable smuggler and will soon provide us with a ship to take us home. Home!" he went on with a sigh. "I call England home now until such time—— But there! I am too sleepy to talk any more. We meet anon when we have both had a rest."

He threw himself on the bed and Matthieu busied himself with undoing his cravat and his shoes.

"Let Matthieu show you how to work the panel from the inside," he said to Martin, "else you would deem yourself a prisoner and contrive an escape as you did from the tower." He yawned and fell back on the pillow. "A good rest to you, milor. I well-nigh said 'Good night,' but anyway, pleasant dreams."

Martin turned into his own room. It was very small, but there was a bed in it which looked comfortable, a chair, a table, a basin and a jug of water. On the table a few toilet appliances probably left there by the last tenant of this aristocratic burrow. Martin wondered what noble fugitive had last spent a night here hoping to reach freedom and England in the end. He sat down on the bed and, resting his elbows on his knees, he cupped his chin in his hands. "I must look a disgusting object," he mused, "with this two days' growth of beard. And to think that I was forced to appear before ladies in this guise. Thank Heaven, there was no mirror in which I could see for myself to what depths of degradation an English gentleman can sink when in search of adventure!"

Thus did he sit and muse, with his chin cupped in his hands and his elbows on his knees. Adventure! Yes! he had come in search of adventure and had found it and to spare in this strange corner of God's earth. What would the outcome of it all be, he wondered. Nothing, of a surety, but lifelong sorrow and regret. He saw it all now, at last; at last he understood. He had been living in dreamland of late, but now he was awake, and he under-

stood. Destiny had brought him hither in one of her maddest moods, just to show him what she might have held for him if he had been other than he now was: a ruined gambler, more of a ne'er-do-well than these fanatical peasants who at least had an ideal for which they could fight and for which they could give their life. But what was the good of his own life, even if sacrificed to the one ideal which henceforth would be his guiding star? Félice de Marillac could never be anything to him, so what was the good of dreaming?

Dreaming! Hoping! Forgetting! These are the privileges which Fate reserves for her elect, and Martin Saint-Denys had defied Fate so often and so long that mayhap now she looked upon him as an enemy and kept her worst blows for him when she granted him a vision of the might-have-been and made him understand that, whatever betide, the one thing he could never do as long as he lived would be to forget.

On the other hand the last thing he wished to do now was to forget. Better by far, he thought, to remember and smile than forget and be sad.

CHAPTER XXIX

MATTHIEU proved to be more of a treasure than Martin had at first dared to hope. Not only did he show his lordship the workings of the panel, but himself went in search of Bunch, who presently arrived laden with some of the most urgent necessities for his master's toilet. A priceless fellow, Bunch! He always got what he wanted, even when it was most ungetatable. Lord Saint-Denys under his valet's able hands felt, after half an hour, that he had become a gentleman once more.

A priceless fellow, Bunch! When he had given a last polish to his lordship's boots, he said:

"Beautiful gardens 'ere, my lord."

"Yes? Rather neglected, what?"

"Would be, my lord, if the young lady did not look after them a bit."

"Oh!" his lordship remarked. "She does that, does she? How do you know?"

"Saw 'er in the top garden, my lord, when I went to fetch this 'ere brush. Just be'ind the 'ouse, my lord——"

"You idiot!" his lordship was pleased to exclaim. "Why didn't you say so before?"

He ran out of the room and across the vestibule, then helter-skelter up the dark stairs. Bunch followed more soberly. His lordship's hands would not be steady enough to find the spring of the panel. He would certainly require the aid of his faithful Bunch. He did. Moreover, how would his lordship ever find his way into the garden which Bunch had already discovered? Bunch had reconnoitred the lay of the ground. A priceless fellow, Bunch!

Confirmation of this pleasing fact was brought home to Martin Saint-Denys within the next few minutes. He had run up the dark staircase blindly, as a sleep-walker in a hurry would. At the top of the stairs he came forcibly to a halt, as he had no idea how to work the panel. But Mr. Bunch already stood behind his lordship, imperturbable and deferential, now as always the perfect gentleman's gentleman.

"This is not the way to the garden, my lord," he said, and although his voice was sunk to a whisper it contrived to be respectful.

"Then why the old Harry did you bring me here, you old villain?" his lordship retorted, being pleased to be facetious. "Go on, lead the way, and mind it be the shortest and the quickest."

"Yes, my lord," said Mr. Bunch sedately, and forthwith turned and led the way down the dark stairs once more, his lordship following close on his heels.

At the bottom of the stairs Bunch turned sharply to the left, and having crossed the square vestibule and gone past the room occupied by the Duc de Berry he turned into a long passage to which a series of tiny loopholes lent a feeble light.

The underground rooms, in one of which at this moment the heir to the throne of France was slumbering peacefully, were actually situated in the basement of the keep, a large square tower which had once been used for dungeons for the captive enemies of mediæval Marquis de Marillac, and the passage into which master and servant had now turned was under the cloisters, which connected the keep with the chapel.

At the end of the passage Mr. Bunch led the way up a flight of stone steps, and finally came to a halt opposite a diminutive iron door, which he opened. "Matthieu left it so for your lordship," he explained, and flattened his bulk against the wall to make way for his master. Martin had to get down on hands and knees in order to crawl through the door; when he was the other side, Bunch pushed it to very gently, and there he remained, sedate and patient, prepared to wait until it pleased his lordship to come back.

With blinking eyes, half blinded by the long walk in the gloom, Saint-Denys peered about him. It took him some time to ascertain that he was in a chapel and that, in point of fact, the diminutive door was part of a pedestal of a large statue of the Virgin set in the angle of a wall. The chapel looked like the rest of the château—in a sad state of desolation. It seemed as if at some time sacrilegious hands had wrought havoc within it, and as if since then no one had had the heart or the money to set it in order again. But, in truth, Martin spent no time in examining his surroundings. The light came streaming in through the porch, and he made his way to it.

Here he had to pause for a moment or two, for, indeed, he could see nothing. After so much dim light, the brilliant afternoon sun which struck full on the opposite wall did temporarily blind him.

Presently, however, he was able to take his bearings. The porch gave on the courtyard of the château, with the square keep in the angle on the right and the main block of the building containing the living-rooms immediately opposite. In the centre of the courtyard there was a marble statue of a rose-crowned Cupid perched on one toe on the top of the world and, thus precariously poised, shooting an arrow into the air. At his feet was a bed wherein violets and snowdrops, winter aconite and scarlet anemones grew in a tangled mass of riotous colour. All round this bed there were rose-bushes just showing bud and standards ornamented with coloured glass balls hoisted on tall sticks. The whole effect was made complete by a row of mop-head acacias all round and under the trees four marble seats facing the four walls of the courtyard.

Madame la Marquise was sitting on one of the seats and Félice stood before her. She had her back to the chapel, and thus masked Saint-Denys from her mother's view. Madame la Marquise was talking, and the tones of her harsh, dry voice came gratingly on Martin's ear.

"You ought to have told me," she was saying.

"But, Maman, I promised René——"

"You shouldn't have promised."

Somehow it seemed to Martin that what he now heard was a reiteration of what had already gone before. Though he could only see Félice's back, every line of her and the bend of her slender neck spoke of intense weariness.

"You could have done nothing, Maman," she said again.

"At least I should have tried."

"And don't you think that I tried? I prayed and entreated. You

know what René is. When he is under Jacques's influence he is like putty. And Jacques is set on that awful enterprise. Do you think *he* was likely to listen to you?"

"To me, no; but to you——"

"Maman——!" the girl protested.

"Eh, what?" Madame retorted harshly. "He is in love with you, and you know it. You could twist him round your finger if you chose."

"Maman! I have already once before begged you on my knees never to speak of such a thing again. Jacques Cottereau is, of all men in the world, the most abhorrent to me. I would no more listen to his protestations of love than I would to the whisperings of the Devil——"

"You would sooner see your brother arraigned before Bonaparte's police as a highway brigand——"

"You have no right to say that, Maman!" Félice retorted firmly. "I owe you all the respect in the world and all the love, but when I hear you talk like that I feel——"

Her voice broke in a sob. Martin, standing there with clenched fists, with finger-nails dug into the palms of his hands and teeth dug into his lips till they bled, could scarce control the impulse to run to her and stand by her in order to silence that wicked old woman, her mother. Evidently Madame felt that perhaps she had gone too far, for she made an effort to speak more gently.

"Don't be childish, Félice," she said. "I know that René is as dear to you as he is to me, though a sister can never realise what a mother's love may mean. But he is all we've got left now, you and I. Therefore, my dear child, it is no use taking certain things *au tragique*. Since the beginning of time women have ruled over the destinies of men. Jacques Cottereau is a brute and a savage, I grant you, but when you are there he becomes as gentle as a lamb. If from the first you had said to him: 'For my sake, don't drag René into this!' he would have obeyed you and we should be spared the terrible anxiety of this coming night and the unthinkable—perhaps certain—tragedy to-morrow."

Félice had obviously made a great effort to swallow her tears, but now at her mother's cruel words she could restrain them no longer. She sank down on the seat and, resting her arms along the back of it, she buried her face in the crook of her elbow. Martin, from where he lurked on the watch, could see her shoulders shaken with sobs. Madame la Marquise's face was now visible to him. It looked hard and set, of a yellowish tinge, like an old parchment. Her lips almost disappeared, so tightly pressed

were they. Martin only saw her in profile, but he was quite sure that there was not a single line of pity or tenderness for her daughter in that stony face. All that Martin could do was to try and gather as much knowledge as possible of the sorrow and anxiety—aye!—even of the danger that threatened Félise.

Madame evidently acted on the principle that if there were tears anywhere about it was best not to check them. With her hands folded in her lap she waited motionless and in silence until the worst of the girl's grief had spent itself. Then she put her hand on Félise's shoulder and compelled her to turn to her. Was it all play-acting or did something in the old woman's glance delude the unfortunate girl into believing in the magnitude of her mother's love? Certain it is that the next moment Félise was lying in Madame's arms with her head pillowed against her breast.

"I have so often thought, my child," Madame resumed after awhile, still holding Félise in her arms, "how beautiful it would be if we could have peace among our people. We all have the same cause at heart: we are all ready to shed the last drop of our blood for our King. It is only our points of view that differ. Then why not reconcile them? While we fight among ourselves and try and thwart one another we can never achieve anything. Our King will remain an exile, the heir to the throne a fugitive, hiding like a wild beast in underground lairs. Union alone will give us strength. Cottereau's enthusiasm, coupled with our more rigid code. . . . Oh! if I were young and beautiful like you——!"

Félise suddenly sat up straight. She wiped her eyes. She gazed at her mother with her large wistful eyes fixed almost in horror upon her.

"Maman!" she murmured in a kind of choked whisper. "You would not suggest . . . ?"

"My dear child, why not?" Madame rejoined coolly. "You would not be the first woman to make such a sacrifice. In very truth in the past a girl of your rank would be compelled for mere reasons of polity to wed the man of her parents' choice. Sometimes even the King would command, and women in those days were forced to obey. Not so long ago, either. My own mother, your beautiful grandmother, Félise, was married thus, much against her will . . ."

"Maman," Félise queried, speaking very slowly, "will you please tell me, without any preamble, just what is in your mind?"

"Only this, my dear—that I have not the intention of commanding or forcing you. My love for you is too great for me to do

aught but accept your decision whatever it might be. All I can do is to put the case before you."

"What case?"

"The cause of our country and our King is in your hands, my dear. How proud would I be if they rested in mine!"

"In what way does the King's cause rest in my hands?"

"Need I cross my t's and dot the i's?" Madame queried sarcastically.

"If you please."

"Very well, then, I'll put it plainly, since you choose to adopt this attitude of disrespect towards your mother. Jacques Cottereau loves you. He has hinted more than once that the ambition of his life is to make you his wife some day when these turbulent times are over. Now you must admit that the whole of his life—every hour of his days and every dream of his nights—is devoted to working in the King's cause. You may not approve of his methods—I myself condemn them—but you have oft said it yourself, that his loyalty, his enthusiasm and courage are beyond question. He has a fine name, had a good position and was possessed of a considerable fortune; all that, everything, he has sacrificed for the King. Every penny of his fortune has gone to pay the irregular troops which he has raised, and now he roams the country in rags, shoeless, often hungry and always homeless, with but one thought to uphold his courage—the cause of our King. For this he starves and fights, cowers in burrows by day and robs and pillages by night. For this he would commit every crime and cheerfully take its consequences. And side by side with this loyalty to his King—in itself the greatest virtue of which any man can boast—there is his love for you. And that love, if given the slightest return, would lead him to greater efforts still, to deeds of valour that would not need the cover of darkness: it would restrain his turbulent passion, tame his domineering temper. And above all, it would unite the people of Normandy in one great bond of loyalty and friendship, with never a dissension to threaten disaster to our cause."

Now she paused. She must, in truth, be out of breath, for she had spoken at great length and with compelling earnestness. Félice had listened to her without making the slightest attempt to interrupt her. Her beautiful mouth was set in those lines of sorrow and childlike helplessness which at first sight of her had appealed to Martin's heart. Her eyes had in them the tragic appeal of a child in pain, of a child that does not understand why it should be made to suffer. For a long time after her mother had

finished speaking she remained thus, quite still, marvelling in very truth how her mother could make her suffer so.

"I have not even mentioned your brother," Madame presently said quite coolly, "although his whole future, his very life, is involved in this."

"How," Félice asked slowly, haltingly, as one whose throat is held in a grip, "how is—René's—life—involved?"

"By your marriage with Jacques Cottereau you can——"

Félice uttered a cry, the first since her mother had propounded this awful suggestion. She stuffed her handkerchief quickly into her mouth in order to choke another.

"You have said it!" she murmured in a vague, dazed kind of manner. "You have said it—at last!"

"Why, of course I've said it, child," the mother retorted complacently. "Why should I not? I have thought of it often enough——"

"And—without horror?"

"Horror? That is an exaggerated word, Félice. But, of course, you are hysterical. For God's sake pull yourself together! One would think I had been reading out your death-sentence."

"That is just what you have done, Maman."

"Because I have suggested your marrying a man who is madly in love with you? His line of ancestry may not be quite so long as yours, but if I do not object why should you? Besides, one would think I was trying to coerce you. I am doing nothing of the sort; I have merely put it to you that by marrying Jacques Cottereau you would be serving the King's cause in a manner worthy the tradition of the de Marillacs, who have always made their personal feelings subservient to their loyalty, and that you would also be the means of saving your brother René from evil influences, which, as sure as I am alive, will ultimately land him on the scaffold."

"You talk of evil influences," the girl protested with obvious weariness, "and yet you——"

"Evil influences will turn to good if you will think less of yourself and more of your brother, of your mother and of your King."

After which final diatribe she rose, and with utmost complacence patted Félice on the shoulder.

"There, my child," she said, "we'll leave it at that for the moment. I have great faith in your good heart and in your sense of duty, so I'll say no more. Think about it, my dear Félice, quietly, by yourself. Ask the Holy Virgin and the saints for

guidance. I particularly recommend you to pray to St. Thomas à Kempis, who always knew how to put us women into our proper sphere."

She touched Félice's forehead lightly with her lips. Then she sailed away, and Martin was again reminded of the Spanish Armada. So would King Philip's galleons have looked had they departed in triumph. Saint-Denys had never felt so near to deliberate murder in all his life before.

CHAPTER XXX

AND now what in the world was Martin Saint-Denys to do? Here was the woman whom he loved beyond all things in as great distress and as grave a danger as ever threatened a sensitive and high-spirited girl. To avert that danger and free her from distress Martin would gladly have given his life, but short of murdering Madame la Marquise or Cottereau or both, what could he do? Félice de Marillac was all the world to him and he less than nothing to her. He could not even run to her now, seize her in his arms and fly the country with her. There was that accursed promise which bound him to the side of a selfish weakling, and there were the laws of France which did not permit the marriage of a minor without the parent's consent.

Marriage? Heavens above! the presumption, the madness of such a thought! He could not presume to approach Félice de Marillac. But then . . . what then? Was that exquisite woman to be left to the tender mercies of a Jacques Cottereau, to be handed as a bait to tame a savage tiger? Cottereau, ye gods!

He must unwittingly have closed his eyes while these raging thoughts ran swiftly through his brain, for presently he opened them to look again on Félice, for to one thing he had irrevocably made up his mind and that was that he would speak with her, assure her of his service and beg her to let him be her friend. She had risen in the meanwhile and was coming towards the chapel. All the better, thought Martin. The peace and loneliness of the consecrated place would add weight to what he wished to say. Softly he withdrew into the little chapel and, ensconced behind a pillar, he watched her come in. She knelt down on one of the *prie-Dieu* and buried her face in her hands. Martin did not think that she was crying, probably she was not even praying. And presently she rose from her knees and sat down, looking like a veritable statue of dejection; more, of despair. The light in the

small chapel was very dim and Martin could only just see her beautiful head bent and her hands—those hands which he loved to touch—lying idly in her lap. Lovely hands she had, so soft and pliable to the touch. Martin had kissed them once just above the edge of the glove: the savour of them still lingered on his lips.

There was an empty chair next to where she sat and, approaching on tiptoe, Martin presently half knelt, half sat down beside her. He murmured, "Mademoiselle Félice!" She started and looked round at him. Indeed she had not been crying, but there was such an expression of hopeless misery in her eyes that Martin all at once knew just what a mother must feel like when her child is in pain. Even the great love which had sprung in his heart at first sight of this beautiful woman became suddenly transformed, etherealised into an overwhelming tenderness.

She seemed confused, like one waking from a dream, and stammering, "Milor . . . I did not know . . ." made as if she would quickly rise. But this, of course, he would not allow her to do. He ventured to put his hand on her.

"Mademoiselle," he said in a soft whisper, "will you just for one moment forget who I am and what I am—a stranger who is less than nothing to you—and think of me only as a servant, a menial to whom you can give what command you choose, certain that it will be obeyed."

"I do not understand, milor . . ."

"What I mean is that you are in grave trouble. I was in the porch just now and I heard every word that Madame la Marquise spoke to you . . ."

"Milor——!"

"I know I ought not to have listened. It was presumptuous, impertinent, if you will. Had it concerned anyone else but you I should not have been guilty of such eavesdropping, but it was you, mademoiselle, who sat there and were forced to listen to such cruel words, and so I listened and debated in my mind how best I can serve you since you are all the world to me."

"You speak strangely, milor," she murmured. "How can I be all the world to you?"

"Good God!" Martin ejaculated with sudden uncontrollable impulse, "has no man ever used those words to you before?"

Gravely she shook her head and then the ghost of a smile softened for a brief instant the sorrowful lines around her lips.

"How should they?" she said, "and who are they who could speak so to me?"

"Any man with eyes in his head and blood in his veins."

"But, milor, I see no one here—no one, that is, except . . ."

She paused, and slowly a wave of colour came to her pale cheeks.

These were the occasions when my lord Saint-Denys saw red.

"Except," he said roughly, "a lot of savage louts, unfit to lick the soles of your shoes, and one of whom—the worst, the most savage, the most criminal—has dared to speak of love to you."

At this she drew herself up, withdrew her hand which, strangely enough, still lay under his. She was remembering that she was Félice de Marillac, the scion of one of the greatest houses in France, and that here was a stranger, an adventurer according to his own showing, a *chevalier d'industrie*, perhaps, who actually dared to speak to her in a manner that even an intimate friend would not venture to assume without Maman's consent.

"Milor," she said coldly, "you have no right——"

"I know I haven't," Martin broke in quickly. "That is—I mean that I know I haven't the right to pry into your secrets, but no power on earth can deny me the right to love you. To begin with, I cannot help it, anyhow. I loved you the very instant that I caught sight of you at the *Chat qui Saute*, and I have gone on from love to worship until I see nothing ahead of me except the possible joy of shedding every drop of my blood for you. There now! I've said it, and I shall never, never speak of it again, so don't take your darling hand away. Think of me as a sick man whose intense pain a touch from you can ease."

Martin had been endowed by Nature with an attribute which she often bestows on Englishmen: he had a very beautiful speaking voice, into which he could at will put tones of soul-stirring tenderness. Many a woman's heart had quickened its beating at sound of my lord Saint-Denys's voice murmuring words of transient passion in her ear, but how infinitely greater the appeal of that voice now, when it was the man's entire soul that found expression in his words. Félice de Marillac, however solitary her life may have been, was no longer a child. Sorrow and hardship had long since made a woman of her, even from the moment when she held her murdered brother in her arms. It was in that terrible hour that she became a woman, when in vibrant tones she called down God's curse on the assassins. Since then she had realised that she had a will of her own, apart from the tyranny of her mother: ideals of her own apart from the set views of those of her kindred and kind. From that hour she ceased to be a puppet dangled at will by the leaders of the party to which she belonged by virtue of her birth and education: she became a creature of

flesh and blood, free to live her own life, free to think, to love or to hate, but also free to suffer in her loneliness.

And now suddenly out of the dreary darkness in which her soul had for the past two years groped in vain for happiness, there came this ray of light—the love of a man who asked nothing but to be allowed to love her and to serve her, and asked it in accents that brought a strange thrill to her heart. While the warm accents of his voice came softly murmuring to her ears a wonderful sense of well-being spread over her whole body: they seemed to loosen her limbs and to quicken the blood in her veins; they brought tears to her eyes that were not tears of pain. She did not actually yield her hands, but allowed them once more to rest in her lap, and when Milor's hands covered them she did not draw them away, whereat he gave a quaint little chuckle.

"There now," he said, "that's much better. That is, I feel a different man. . . . We've cleared the air, haven't we? You know for a certainty that I am your absolute slave, and I think I can guess that you are going to trust me. Is that so?"

She gave him a glance and murmured: "Yes," almost inaudibly.

"Right!" he said, quite coolly. "Now let me see if I've got it right. Call me a fool any time you like if I'm wrong. The chief trouble, as I understand it, is that your brother, René, is hand-in-glove with that da—— I mean, with that Jacques Cottereau, who at the present moment is ready with a pretty scheme which may land the lot of you on the gallows—not you, of course, mademoiselle," he went on glibly. "I don't mean that, but the danger to your brother is very real indeed."

"To us all, milor; to Maman as well as to René: they have hung women for less than highway robbery. If René is caught we shall all be involved and——"

"And then the heavens will fall or the world will come to an end, so we are not going to think of that. Madame la Marquise, I gather, has an idea that if that infamous sacrilege of your marriage to Cottereau comes about, you can turn the tiger into a lamb and free your brother from its claws. Is that right?"

"Maman has only one idea," Félice said with a deep sigh, "the King's cause."

"And you, Félice," Martin asked with sudden earnestness, "would you willingly lend yourself to such a monstrous bargain?"

"Not willingly——"

"But," he insisted, "you have already contemplated the sacrifice?"

"We women, it seems, are made for sacrifice."

"Women, yes—but not angels!"

"My brother René—he is all we've got in the world—the last of our race. My father would—— Oh, my God! If only I knew what to do!"

It seemed like a cry of despair, but there was in it a distinct tone of appeal, a tone which sent Martin's pulses beating furiously, for Félice when she said those words turned to him and it seemed—nay, it was obvious—that the appeal was to him.

"What you have to do, heart of my heart," he said gently, "is to trust me."

"I do trust you, I do," she rejoined earnestly; "but what can you do? You cannot speak with René; he would not listen to you."

"Of course he would not. And before I had spoken three words with him one of my friend Cottureau's followers would have put a bullet in my back."

"Then what, in God's name, will you do?"

"In God's name I know not—yet! But soon I will—when I am away from you and can think quietly."

"Then I'll go now," she said naïvely.

"No, no—don't go! Stay here and say lots of prayers. I'll go back to my underground quarters. I know my way, and my priceless Bunch is, I doubt not, waiting for me somewhere behind that absurd little door."

"And then you'll come back?"

"Very soon."

"I think I'll wait," she murmured, "while you think, down there, quietly."

"And while you wait, heart of my heart," he said with intense earnestness, "I implore you to remember this: never while I live shall the man Cottureau dare to call you wife. So put that dread out of your mind. As for your brother, he shall go over to England in the company of the future King of France. How this will come about I know not. But it shall, I swear it on mine honour and on your golden head! Say your prayers now, my beloved, for of a certainty as there is a God in Heaven, He will hear you and grant you what you ask."

And Martin Saint-Denys put both knees to the ground, and taking those lovely hands of hers in his he covered them with kisses. Gently she released one of them and put it on his head. His hair was crisp and soft and of a warm chestnut-brown. Félice thought how nice it was to pass one's fingers through that crisp hair. She was suffering from terrible heart-ache and from over-

weening anxiety and sorrow, but somehow this moment appeared inexpressibly sweet. She would have liked to remain thus for hours and hours with the English milor kneeling before her and his warm lips pressed against her hand. She had read many English books, and in one of them (it was a play by the great William Shakespeare) there was a phrase that came to her mind: "Parting," it said, "is such sweet sorrow." And she, too, like the heroine of the play, would fain have prolonged this farewell until to-morrow.

Then, when after awhile—all too brief, alas!—Milor went away and she was left alone in the dimly lit chapel, she fell to musing on things she had never thought of before—things that to her knowledge were still mysterious and obscure, such as her own feelings over this matter of the stranger who had so unaccountably come into her life. What exactly did he mean of her? A friend, of course, since he sympathised with her grief and understood her anxiety. A friend? Yes. A brother? Perhaps. And yet, somehow, neither; for Félice, inexperienced though she was and unversed in matters of the heart, was fully conscious of the fact that when her thoughts turned to René or to some friend of her childhood, her heart beat no faster for the thought, nor did she feel that marvellous sense of elation as if her whole being was transported to some other sphere. And, of a certainty, the thought of brother or friend had not the power to make her cheeks aflame.

And thus musing Félice de Marillac—quite unconsciously, I do assure you—raised her hands to her face and pressed them first against her cheeks and then the backs of them against her lips. And never in all her life, when René had fondled her hands or some friend had kissed them, had she afterwards pressed them against her lips.

Thus did Madame la Marquise find her presently—sitting all alone in the chapel in the dark; not praying, not crying; only sitting there like a beautiful carved statue of alabaster, so motionless was she.

"Oh, there you are!" Madame exclaimed with obvious relief. "I have been looking for you everywhere. And Monseigneur has been asking after you. What in the world are you doing here?"

And Félice, quickly rising, replied unblushingly:

"You ordered me, Maman, to think over what you said."

"Well? And did you?"

"Yes."

Strangely enough, Madame did not then pursue the subject, although she threw a quick appraising glance on her daughter.

"Monseigneur is waiting," was all she said. "He desires a game of tric-trac with you."

A game of tric-trac with her future King! Only yesterday Félise de Marillac would have felt pleased and honoured to be thus singled out for his entertainment. But now . . . ! A game of tric-trac when Milor had enjoined her to say lots of prayers, which she had quite neglected to do, and to wait for his return, which, he said, would be very soon. She certainly had not asked *le bon Dieu* to grant her any special grace, and now if she stayed and argued with Maman, Milor might suddenly return, which would be disastrous while Maman was here. Besides, when the future King of France commands, what can a Demoiselle de Marillac do but obey?

And so Félise obediently followed her mother and anon sat down to a game of tric-trac with Monseigneur.

CHAPTER XXXI

It was night. The soft honey-coloured light of the waning moon came shyly peeping through the bare branches of the forest trees. The tangled undergrowth shivered under the gentle lashings of the breeze; yet not altogether under these lashings, for under cover of the scrub men lay huddled, sleeping, and now and then one of them moved or turned over on this hard couch provided by Mother Earth with a pillow here and there of moss. The night had been very still, save for the soft sighing of the leafless boughs and the furtive footsteps of tiny beasts on the prowl. A few minutes ago from the distant village of Soulanges there had come the sound of the church clock striking four.

Then one of the huddled forms moved, struggled to its feet, shook itself as would a frowsy dog. A tall form it was, that of a man broad-shouldered and with a big shaggy head crowned with dark unruly hair, half the face hidden by a huge black beard. He stamped his feet against the moss-covered earth for the morning was cold and his limbs were stiff. A voice close to him asked, "Is it the hour, Jacques?"

"Yes," he said, "a few minutes past four. I'll wake the others."

He went through the scrub from one form to the other, waking each sleeper with a touch of his foot. There were thirty of them all told: each one had slept with a musket close to his hand. They roused themselves one by one, struggled to their feet, stretched and yawned. They were used to these sort of nights out

in the open and slept as soundly on Mother Earth as in their own often squalid homes.

"What time is it?" some of them asked.

"Past four. Not long to wait now."

Five o'clock was the time when the Government coach from Falaise with its precious freight of gold was due to come this way, but the unexpected does have a way of happening and Cottereau never left anything to chance. Better wait an hour than be five minutes late. The men had provisions, scanty and rough, but enough to keep their tough bodies and fanatical souls together. Cottereau, however, was too excited to eat. After he had roused all the men, he came and sat down on a tree-stump beside René de Marillac, his faithful, his obedient lieutenant. René was always ready to share every hardship with the men. As a child he had been reared at La Villorée in the lap of luxury; those were still the days of brilliant courts at the Tuileries and Versailles, and together with most of the scions of ancient, aristocratic families the tiny boy was one of the pages in the suite of Marie-Antoinette: then came trouble and the dark days of the Revolution, with ever increasing dire poverty, and finally these days when, having succeeded in overcoming his mother's prejudices against Cottereau's enterprises he had joined the Chouans in most of their nefarious practices. Now, as Madame la Marquise well knew, the last descendant of the de Marillacs was just a malleable tool in the hands of Jacques Cottereau, ready to drag his honoured name in the mire, in the blind belief that he was thus serving the cause of his King.

He was sitting now on the hard ground with his knees drawn up, his delicate hands, roughened by hard outdoor life, clasped about his knees. The fire of enthusiasm and the thrill of adventure glowed in his blue eyes; despite the sharp tang in the air his cheeks were aflame and his hands were hot with the fever in his blood. The road along which the Government coach was due to pass was distant less than twenty yards from where he and some of the men were sitting and waiting with their muskets on the ground beside them. After a moment or two Jacques Cottereau rose, and hands in pockets, started pacing up and down the soggy road. René now couldn't see him, but he could hear his feet squelching in the mud. Now and again Jacques would pause and raise his head and turn it in the direction where lay Le Quesnay. An intent look would then settle in his eyes and he would strain his ears to listen for the sound of coach wheels far away, but no sound came—not yet. The men went on munching their hard

crusts of bread. Very seldom did one or the other of them utter a word. They were used to silence, these men, and knew, no one better, how to bear their souls in patience. It was only René who gradually grew more feverish and more impatient. But then René was only twenty, and this was the biggest adventure he had ever been allowed to enter on. After awhile he could contain his impatience no longer. He jumped to his feet and waylaid Cottereau on the road.

"No sound yet, Jacques?" he asked huskily.

"Nothing," the other replied, "but it's quite likely they may be late."

The hour went by leaden-footed. Half a league away the church clock of Soulanges struck one quarter of an hour after the other. The night air was so still that the sound came clearly through, wafted on the north-westerly breeze. But from the opposite direction not a sound. And now far out in the eastern sky the faint light of dawn tinged the sky with silver. The waning moon, still radiant, partially veiled her glory in filmy clouds. The stars paled, and the church clock of Soulanges struck five.

"We should be hearing something by now, shouldn't we, Jacques?" René asked anxiously.

Cottereau's reply was a muttered curse. The men glanced at one another, some of them shrugged, a few of them swore, but they were all of them content to wait. They had such indomitable faith in Cottereau. Slowly the silver of the sky turned to lemon-gold. In the branches of the trees a soft fluttering of wings proclaimed that little birds were waking to the dawn. Sparrows began to twitter. A crested jay with much flapping of wings flew over the road. Dead boughs crackled and snapped under gentle blows from the morning breeze, but no other sound came to the watchers' ears. And Cottereau strained his ears to listen, his glowering eyes swept over the length of the road and tried to pierce the thicket in search of the coach and its escort. The coach, the welcome coach, with its precious load of gold that would enable him to carry on his ambitious schemes for the restoration of the King and for his own rise to almost supreme power. Money! It was only money that he lacked. He had energy, brains, enthusiasm, everything. But money . . . ! His men were starving and he knew it. They were half naked, shoeless, homeless. They could not carry on much longer. Money he must have, and a lot of it. Petty pilfering was not enough. Robbery and intimidation had brought in a few thousands, could bring in a few thousands more. This was the great *coup* that would enable him to carry on for at least

another year, and by that time surely Fate would tire of always thwarting him.

"What in the devil's name can have happened?" he muttered with an oath as the church clock of Soulanges struck six.

"Let me go on towards Le Quesnay, Jacques," René's gentle voice broke in on his savage mood, "and see if I can hear anything. There has been some delay, of course. Probably quite natural; a horse gone lame or something. I might hear without having to go very far. You can't leave the men, but I'll go. . . . Anyway," he added with an impatient sigh, "I cannot sit still."

Cottereau made no reply, only drew in his breath with a stertorous sound. René took silence for consent and started to go at a good pace up the road. Almost as soon as his young slender figure had disappeared beyond the first clump of thicket Cottereau seemed to wake from the semi-conscious state into which his fury had plunged him, and realised that René had gone off unarmed. He could not, of course, have carried a musket as that might have aroused the suspicion of some other passer-by directly he got out into the open, but it would certainly be better if he had a pistol in his belt. Cottereau called to the man nearest him.

"Here, Paul," he commanded, and took from his own belt the two pistols which he always carried. "Run after Monsieur le Vicomte and give him one of these. Keep the other for your own use, and you'd best go with him as far as he wants to go."

Paul took the pistols and started at a sharp trot in the wake of de Marillac. Cottereau watched him out of sight, then curbing his temper and his impatience as best he could he sat down on a tree stump and settled down to wait.

CHAPTER XXXII

AND much in the same way as did the men out in the forest, Félice de Marillac kept vigil through the night. She did her duty by the future King of France all evening by playing tric-trac with him and singing the sweet old French ditties to her own accompaniment on the spinet. And all the while her heart was out there in the open beyond the valley and over the hills, following in thought the stranger who had so unaccountably come into her life. Whither had he gone? How did he fulfil his promise that René should not be involved in Cottereau's shameful act of brigandage? He had no means of knowing where René was or whither he had gone. Then what was his intention? There was a mystery about all

that which caused her keen anxiety. In thought she followed him, but how could she, since she knew not whither he had gone? There were moments, while she sang an old ditty and her fingers rested on the old ivory keys, when her voice almost broke in a sob, and had she seriously asked herself then what caused her heart to ache she could not have given answer, except perhaps that she was anxious about René.

Monseigneur was most gracious and asked more than once why the dear child, as he deigned to call her, seemed so sad and at times so *distracte*, and Maman, who never forgot her courtly manner in the presence of royalty, would assure Monseigneur that Félise had no cause for sorrow save in her anxiety for her brother, whereupon he was gracious enough to declare that he would not leave France save in the company of René de Marillac.

"We must," he said, "keep the boy safely out of the clutches of Cottereau."

But when night came and the Duc de Berry finally retired to his underground apartments Félise felt free to lose control of herself if she chose. It proved a relief to pace up and down her room, certain that no one would ask embarrassing questions, not even Maman. Indeed Maman had been most kind, had embraced her daughter with unwonted tenderness, but all the same Félise felt those hard eyes fixed searchingly upon her; she even thought that Maman's tenderness meant a hardening of her will and that her kiss was one of forgiveness for her daughter's short-lived obstinacy. No one had ever disobeyed Madame la Marquise for long, least of all her children, and with that kiss upon her cheek Félise felt that her submission to Maman's will had in reality been sealed.

After Madame la Marquise had gone something of that obsession fell away from the girl. It seemed as if her thoughts had suddenly been set free. She pulled aside the curtains of her window and looked out into the night. The waning moon was not yet up, but the night was not dark. The deep blue canopy of the sky looked as if it had been peppered by a giant hand with myriads of stars that twinkled and blinked, each with a radiance and colour of its own. Down below in the valley the river meandered in its shallow, stony bed with a happy gurgling sound, and, far beyond, the other side of the valley, the battlements of the old tower peeped above the woodland height, and the road like a pale ribbon wound its way south-westward to Soulanges. Between the river and the village lay the grass meadow where she, Félise, had drawn in her horse and had sat there in the saddle while a man's

earnest voice came pleading to her ear, pleading for her help which she was unable to give. And his face had been raised so that the moon played on his crisp brown hair whilst his deep-set eyes, of a colour she could not define, were fixed upon her with an expression which even now sent a thrill through her veins.

Where was he now? Whither had he gone? The ever-recurrent questions tortured her through the night. She knew that glances filled with hatred and suspicion would dog his footsteps wherever he went; she knew of Cottereau's savage orders to his men to shoot the stranger on sight. And even now as she gazed over the valley and her anxious eyes tried to pierce the gloom, it seemed to her that furtive forms lurked in the thickets and moved stealthily through the undergrowth. Midway through the night she bethought herself of the chapel where milor had begged her to wait for him. Ought she not at all costs to have waited, even at the risk of depriving Monseigneur of his game of tric-trac? Ought she to have made a clean breast of it to him and thrown herself on his mercy? Alas! it was too late to think of that now. And then there was Maman. She never would have allowed private concerns to be thrust under the notice of her future King. But now . . . everyone was abed. There was just a chance. . . . Eager and excited, Félice, wrapped up in her cloak and hood, hastened down the stairs. She slipped noiselessly through the postern gate that gave on the courtyard, then ran quickly across to the chapel.

It was dark and deserted. The waning moon sent her mysterious silvery light slanting through the narrow windows; it touched the edge of the *prie-Dieux*, outlined the marble images of the Virgin and the saints, touched with a tantalising glint the tiny secret door under the statue of Our Lady; but milor was not there, and the secret door was locked. Indeed, how could he be there and yet be fulfilling his promise to find René? Félice knelt down in utter dejection. She tried to pray and could not. All she could do was to murmur through quivering lips, "May God guard and aid you, dear milor!"

CHAPTER XXXIII

AND at another window of the old château, Madame la Marquise, too, kept a vigil. She had no thought save for her son. The same questions tortured her that were keeping Félice on the rack. Where was René now? Whither had he been led by the powerful will of the iron-handed Cottereau? She could not sleep, either, for self-

accusation, for had she not allowed René to drift almost unwittingly into the talons of that ambitious, high-soaring eagle? Blinded by her own fanaticism, she had failed to keep a curb on René's boyish enthusiasm, as she had done two years ago when first Jacques Cottereau had assumed command and forced his way into La Villorée to demand help and arms in the King's name. On that day, two years ago, little Alain had died, hit by a chance shot, and her heart had been full of bitterness against all these boors who thought to serve the King by fair means or foul. Since then the hardships which she had endured, the tyranny of the new régime, the sublime sacrifices offered by others in the King's cause, had gradually turned her into a fanatic like those, whose motto proclaimed that the end justified the means. She had drifted into believing that Cottereau was the only man alive who could encompass the restoration of the King. Neither Cadoudal, nor Pichegru nor any of the others had his energy, his resourcefulness, his indomitable pluck, and gradually she had allowed René to drift, and had hardened her heart against Félice, who alone mistrusted and dreaded Cottereau and his schemes. Even now, though in her heart the proud Marquise must have condemned the Chouans' criminal acts, she would whole-heartedly have condoned them but for the disgrace which might fall on the Royal house, on her family and on her son, should Bonaparte's police ever get wind of them.

And while she watched half the night through at her window she thought only of René: she felt no compunction for what she had said to Félice. If Félice's marriage to Jacques Cottereau would serve the King's cause, Félice naturally must make the sacrifice. Girls of the proudest French *noblesse* had before now made greater sacrifices than a repugnant marriage for love of King and country; and Madame was certain in her own mind that, with a woman's restraining influence over his more savage moods, Cottereau would indeed become the longed-for leader of the Royalist cause, honoured, respected, followed just as blindly as before, until victory would surely crown his high-minded efforts for the overthrow of the Corsican usurper and the restoration of the Royal house of Bourbon to the throne of France.

But for the moment, even her thoughts of the King and of the throne of France became subservient to the fears for René. Her restless mind tried to visualise him on this night which might be so fateful to him and the cause. The boy was so enthusiastic, so selfless, his young heart was wrapped up in the King's cause, his will and his actions were enchained to Jacques

Cottureau. If anything went wrong to-night, if Bonaparte's gendarmes got wind of the affair, if the enterprise was checked and there were arrests, René would choose to suffer with the rest. His passionate soul would long to endure disgrace and death along with the others.

Kneeling on her *prie-Dieu* at the foot of Our Lady of Sorrows, Madame de Marillac prayed this night as she had never prayed before :

"Dear God, do not take him from me. My René! my only comfort, my only hope for the future. Send him back to me unscathed! Do not allow——"

But at this point the ardent prayer froze on her lips. It seemed as if an insidious voice had whispered in her ear: "What are you praying for? Are you asking God to help Cottureau and your son to commit a crime this night? To rob and pillage? To murder? or are you asking the Virgin-Mother to turn your son into a coward? to make him run away, to think of his own safety, leaving his friends and his followers to suffer the ignominy of defeat? Is that what you are praying for?"

And Madame, unable to enforce silence on that insidious voice, unable to remain on her knees, rose from her *prie-Dieu* and resumed her restless pacing up and down the room. Up and down. Now as far as the window, then to the door, then back to the window, drawing the curtains aside, peering out into the darkness, watching the waning moon, as cold and mysterious she slowly tore aside the veil of clouds that had hidden her light up to now. Peering and listening; straining her ears for sounds of distant musket shot, then covering them with her trembling ice-cold hands lest she should hear what at this hour she dreaded more than any other sound on earth.

And if, during these hours of mental agony, Madame's thoughts did at any moment revert to her daughter, it was with bitter resentment. But for Félice's obstinacy the enterprise would never have been planned. With her marriage to Cottureau such criminal ventures would not have been contemplated. Even now, if it pleased *le bon Dieu* to restore René unscathed to his mother's arms, she vowed that the terrible enterprise of this night would be the last of its kind.

That, at any rate, was something to pray for. "Dear God," Madame sighed as standing at the window with hands clasped, she watched the first streak of grey dawn pierce the mantle of the night, "dear God! cause the obstinate heart of Félice to melt, bend her stubborn will to Thine!"

And this time she closed her ears to any insidious voice which might whisper to her that of the many crimes committed by fanatics in an earthly cause, the greatest crime of all would be the throwing of a sensitive girl into the arms of an unprincipled runagate.

CHAPTER XXXIV

THE great gates of the château—the ones down below that gave direct access to the road—were always kept locked whenever Monseigneur the Duc de Berry slept beneath its roof. Soon after eleven o'clock on this same morning the clang of the outside bell roused the echo of the ancient building; Félice, fully dressed, though nerve-racked after that sleepless night, ran downstairs. She waited on the great landing—the very spot where two years ago her little brother Alain had fallen dead in her arms—listening to Matthieu's footsteps as he crossed the hall, to the opening of the grille, to the several sounds that told of the old man's going down the terraced gardens to open the outside gate.

A few moments later Matthieu returned. He had a letter in his hand. At once Félice's thoughts turned to Milor.

"What is it, Matthieu, a letter?" she asked eagerly. "For me?"

"No, Mademoiselle. It is for Madame la Marquise," Matthieu replied.

"I'll take it. Who brought it?"

"I don't know the man, Mademoiselle. He said that he came from Calvaert and that the letter was urgent."

Félice ran with it to her mother. At a glance she saw that Madame, too, had passed a sleepless night. She was not yet dressed, but sat wrapped in a gown, in a big chair by the window. It was not difficult to guess that here she had sat for many hours, watching for the return of her son.

The enterprise planned for last night had not materialised. This was evidenced by the fact that no sound of musket shot had been heard throughout the night. This fact also went to prove that nothing very serious had happened out there, or of a surety the evil news would have reached the château by now. Evil news has a way of travelling apace.

Madame la Marquise as the early morning hours sped by had become somewhat reassured. Nothing very serious had happened to René! He had not yet returned, but nothing very serious had happened to him or some messenger of evil tidings would have found his way to La Villorée ere now. Anxiety was still there, but

it had become less agonising. Delay was the essence of Madame's schemes and of her hopes. Delay meant the ultimate victory over Félise's obstinacy, and after that, a greater sense of security and of peace.

Eagerly she stretched out her hand, as Félise entered with the letter.

"From René, think you?" she asked.

"The man who brought it came from Calvaert," Félise said.

"Calvaert? Then it will be for Monseigneur . . ."

Madame hastily scanned the letter.

"Yes," she said, "that is it. I don't know who wrote this, but it says that there is an English ship in port, ready to take on a passenger or two. And since Monseigneur desires to go . . ."

"It is better so, maman," Félise rejoined quietly. "His Majesty wishes it, and is probably devoured with anxiety, not hearing any news."

Madame gave an impatient little sigh.

"I suppose you are right. Though God knows, I, too, am devoured with anxiety about René; yet meseems that our future King's place is here among his people. It will be an acknowledgment of failure for us all when Monseigneur goes."

"Better than all this brigandage," the girl retorted vehemently: "Think! if this morning's ugly work has failed and the police are on the scent . . ."

She had not the heart to say more. Her mother had already suffered so much that this anxiety about René seemed as if it might kill her. She hardly seemed alive this morning. Every drop of blood seemed to have left her cheeks and lips, and when she rose from the chair, she staggered as if ready to fall.

"Maman, you are ill!" Félise exclaimed, and her loving arms encircled the trembling figure that looked so small and so pathetic after the vigil of this terrible night.

"No," Madame replied, and quite gently but very firmly she disengaged herself from her daughter's arms. With a great effort of will she steadied not only her hand, but also her voice: "I am not ill," she said dryly. "I haven't slept, that is all."

"Anxiety, I am afraid, maman . . ." Félise murmured shyly, for she had been driven back, as it were, into herself by her mother's frigid manner . . . "for René . . . I, too . . ."

"Anxiety," Madame broke in curtly, "lest a daughter of mine should prove a traitor to our King."

"Maman! . . ."

"I am not going to talk about it this morning, Félise. I am too

utterly weary to commence discussion again. When I think that if you had listened to me when first I broached the subject, six months ago, René would not now . . ."

Her harsh voice almost broke into a sob, but she had such marvellous control over herself, that with a snap of her thin lips she appeared to relegate every emotion into the innermost recesses of her soul. Félice gave a quick sigh, which she also did her best to control, then she said more coolly :

"Shall Matthieu go and tell Monseigneur about the letter?"

"I'll go myself," Madame rejoined, equally coolly, "as soon as I am dressed. I am so mortified that René is not here to escort Monseigneur to Calvaert. I shall have to offer my personal excuses. . . ."

"Perhaps if we wait till the afternoon . . ."

Madame had taken her seat on the swivel chair at her toilet-table and set to work to arrange her hair. In the mirror Félice could see her mother's face, hard and almost expressionless save for the sudden ironical curl of her lips as she remarked dryly :

"You still have hopes, then?"

"Of René's return? Yes!"

"Pray God you are right. But I don't see on what grounds . . ."

"Maman," Félice said, trying to keep the tone of reproach out of her voice, "were you forgetting my lord Saint-Denys, and what he has already done for Monseigneur?"

"Oh! my lord Saint-Denys!" Madame retorted casually, while she continued to arrange her hair. "As the Duke says, he was really useful in bringing over those papers. Though, God knows, it would have been better if Monseigneur had been kept in ignorance of things he cannot really prevent, without becoming a traitor to his own cause."

"But, Maman, when His Majesty himself . . ."

"Yes! I know, I know. And what's done now, cannot be undone. Monseigneur has lost confidence in the only man who can restore him to his throne, and he is going back to England leaving us all to fight his battles for him. All this we owe," she added with unblushing want of logic, "to that interfering Englishman."

"If René . . ." Félice began hotly.

"What?" Madame broke in curtly. "He is not going to interfere with René, I hope."

"If he does, it will be to save René from being involved again in Cottereau's criminal follies."

Madame suddenly swung round on the swivel chair.

"You seem to have grown very vehement all of a sudden, my

child," she said, with cold irony: "And just look at your cheeks . . ."

She rose and took Félise by the wrist, dragged her to the toilet-table and pointed to the mirror.

"And at your eyes . . . I hope for your sake, that you are not exalting that *chevalier d'industrie* into a romantic hero. It would be too utterly childish."

Félise, hurt and mortified, shocked, too, by her mother's calousness and ingratitude, had turned abruptly towards the door, but with a word Madame detained her:

"Come," she said, with a harsh laugh, "help me on with my dress, and do not turn sulky. I am going down now to speak with Monseigneur. Wait here for me, as I may want you to give orders about the coach or His Highness's meals."

She said nothing more while she put the finishing touches to her toilet, a bit of lace in her white hair, the chain round her neck which contained a relic of the martyred King, the mittens over her fleshless hands. Just before she went out of the door, she turned finally to Félise and said:

"In the meanwhile, child, I forbid you . . . you understand what I mean by forbid? . . . I forbid you to speak to that English adventurer again."

CHAPTER XXXV

THE rest of the morning was taken up with preparations for the departure of Monseigneur the Duc de Berry. In the château de la Villorée no one was allowed to forget for one instant that the future King of France was resting beneath its roof. All the state rooms were closed and there were only half a dozen old horses in the stables, but indoors Matthieu with his wife and daughters, and outside Pierre and his son Hector bustled, if only to the extent that such a limited staff could be held to bustle. They came and went, upstairs, downstairs, getting orders, preparing, arranging, contriving for the departure of Monseigneur, whilst Madame exerted all her powers of conversation to keep Monseigneur from feeling bored until such time as he chose to step into the coach. Pierre and Hector had to don their ancient liveries. Matthieu was preparing the table for a last meal of farewell, for in truth His Royal Highness held out no hopes that he would visit La Villorée again for years, perhaps, to come.

"Not till after you, Madame la Marquise, and our lovely Félise

will have been to Versailles to pay court to His Majesty the King," he deigned to say when Madame broached the subject of his speedy return to France. It was wonderful how she contrived to control the anxiety which must have grown more and more unendurable as the hours sped by and there was still no news of René, or of Cottereau.

"I think," Monseigneur said with calm indifference, "that Cottereau's amiable plan of robbing the government of its ill-gotten taxes must somehow have failed."

"So long as——" Madame began, but quickly checked the bitter retort which would have sounded unseemly for Royal ears.

"I know what you mean, Madame," His Highness broke in with his pleasant smile, "but I think we may take it that in this case, too, no news is good news. If the police had got wind of the affair you would have had a visit from them here before now."

"God forbid!" she ejaculated.

"Quite so."

Indeed the Duc de Berry was a Bourbon and a gentleman, a gentleman in face of immediate danger as Lord Saint-Denys had found when there was a question of imperilling his life in escaping from the old tower: a gentleman he would be in face of tragedy or death should they ever come his way, just like his uncle had been on the guillotine, but a Bourbon to the core in his complacency the moment danger was past, in his indifferent acceptance of any and every sacrifice made in his cause, certain that God had ordained the world for the special benefit of Royal houses. In his own mind he was quite sure that the return of his uncle Louis XVIII to the throne of France was only a question of time—not far distant time, either. *Le bon Dieu* had sent the Corsican Bonaparte to this unfortunate country as a kind of scourge just to make it appreciate the glory of having rightful kings to sit upon its throne once again, but the period of scourging was already drawing to a close. And in this he was right. Twelve years later almost to a day Paris would acclaim the return of the Bourbon king. And what are twelve years in the history of a nation? What are twelve years in politics?

Certainly nothing of the final tragedy that was ultimately to extinguish the whole dynasty, nothing of the tragedy that was to end his own life, did in this hour mar the self-satisfaction of Monseigneur le Duc de Berry while he listened to the platitudes reeled off for his benefit by Madame la Marquise.

"You must endeavour, madame," he said, "to keep our good René away from the influence of this man Cottereau. If he were

here I would take him with me to England. Perhaps your adventurous milor will bring him along when he has had enough of his own pleasure trip in France."

This was the only allusion he made to the man who had risked his life for him. Madame pursed her lips and threw a glance on Félise who, forced to sit by while all that empty talk went on, allowed her thoughts to go roaming in the wake of the bold adventurer whose continued absence and silence were causing her such gnawing anxiety. He was not the man to leave a promise unfulfilled; if he lived he would be here anon in order to see Monseigneur safely on his way to England: if he lived he would be here now with René as he had promised in the chapel last night. If he lived! The hours sped by and he did not come. Monseigneur was ready to start, with Pierre to drive the coach, and only Pierre's son and the rough lout who had brought the letter from Calvaert were there to watch over the safety of the future King of France. How Félise lived through those few wearisome interminable hours she never knew. At times she felt as if she were not really alive, only in a kind of trance, visualising a corner of the Glatigny woods or a bend in the road to Soulanges, or the common room of the *Cabaret du Pélican* with Milor there, suddenly shot—on sight—by one of Cottereau's men. And hastily she would press her handkerchief to her lips to smother the agonised cry that rose to her throat.

It was two o'clock in the afternoon. Félise was commanded by Madame to see that Pierre brought up the coach to the great gates. She was glad enough of the excuse to run away, and after she had given the orders to Pierre she went out into the road and, with anxious eyes, peered up and down the valley and over the river and up the distant woodland height. Up to the last she remained positive that somehow or other, from somewhere out of the earth or sky, Milor would arrive ready to take his place in the coach beside Monseigneur. That promise of his, that solemn promise that he would see the Duke safely on his way to England, could not remain unfulfilled. Every moment she thought that she would see him striding gaily up or down the road, or scrambling like a truant schoolboy through the brushwood down the hill-side. She expected him. In some subtle sort of way she was conscious of his nearness; she felt that he was near enough for her to call to him, and that then he would come. She was indeed on the very point of calling, but suddenly checked herself, for her sharp eyes had discerned more than one lurking form in the thicket by the road, or ambling beside the stream, and her ears had perceived the cry

of the screech-owl coming from the woodland over the valley, whereupon she found herself hoping and praying that Milor was nowhere nigh.

Now the coach drew up in the road in front of the gates, and Monseigneur, accompanied by Madame and followed by the humble staff, came down the terraced garden ready to go. He said a few more gracious words to Madame and had a pleasant smile for Félise, and then stepped into the coach. Pierre cracked his whip, Hector jumped up on the box beside him, and the man who had brought the letter—a rough enough fellow who had been standing at the horses' heads—climbed up to the rear of the coach. It seems he had met with an accident on his way from Calvaert and cut his head open and he had tied a dirty scarf across his eye and brow: this gave him a peculiarly scrubby appearance, for which Madame la Marquise duly offered humble apologies to Monseigneur for this sorry escort. His Royal Highness, however, was in an amiable mood, relieved undoubtedly at thought of returning to the peace and security of Hartwell: he was pleased to make a final joke at the expense of what he called his guard of honour. The old coach now gave a lurch. Pierre clicked his tongue. Madame and Félise made a deep curtsy, and with much creaking of wheels and grinding of axles the future King of France was finally driven away from La Villorée.

CHAPTER XXXVI

MOST fortunately for Félise's overstrained nerves Madame la Marquise, when at last she shed her self-imposed ceremonial manners, admitted that she felt very tired and had need of a rest. Félise saw her to her room, tucked her up in shawls on the sofa and then, with a deep sense of relief, ran up to her room.

At first she thought that solitude and silence would ease the tension on her nerves, but soon she found that she simply could not rest. She could not sit still. Pacing up and down the room was comforting for a time, but not for long. Every moment she paused by the window, looking, looking, peering, watching for René and for Milor. René she longed to see and dreaded to see Milor. But she saw neither: only now and then a man's head and shoulders would emerge out of the thicket, or perhaps two passers-by in rough country clothes, bare-footed and hands in pockets, would slouch along the road.

After a time the girl felt that she could not bear this suspense

any longer. The inactivity, the silence of the château, the presence of those Chouans in the distance, guessed at rather than actually seen, had become unendurable. She threw a mantle round her shoulders, its hood over her head, and sallied out into the road. More by instinct than set purpose her footsteps led her over the ford and up the woodland height to the old tower. From its battlements she could command an extensive view over the country-side and perchance see or hear something that would allay her anxiety. She met no one on her way, even though she heard from time to time furtive footsteps in the undergrowth, or the crackling of dead twigs under naked feet. But to these sounds she was accustomed. For two years now, since this guerrilla warfare against Bonaparte's government and his police had been started by Jacques Cottereau, the man had lived this life of vagabondage and secrecy. Only women and children remained in the villages, living, often starving, on the scanty produce of their men's acts of brigandage.

Félice was not the least afraid of any of them. She was known to them all, even though by word and deed she had protested against their crimes. But René, alas! had lent the prestige of his name to their enterprises, and because of that every de Marillac was sacrosanct to them all. Half an hour's brisk climb up the height brought her to the tower. The primitive drawbridge was down. She stepped across it and pushed open the door. Just for the moment her eyes, dazzled by the outside light, perceived nothing inside the circular room. Then suddenly a chair was pushed back and fell with a crash to the floor, and a hoarse voice called out her name:

"Félice!"

It was Cottereau. He had jumped to his feet and his hand was laid upon the table. His head and feet were bare, his clothes were covered with mud, his hair and beard were in a wild tangle. His eyes, dark and glowering, were fixed with a kind of savage inquiry upon her.

Félice's first instinct was one of recoil. Whatever or whomever she had expected to find here, it certainly was not Cottereau. Her aversion to him was very great, and usually the last thing in the world she ever wished was to speak with him; but to-day she had René in her mind. If Jacques was here, René could not be far. And thinking only of René she went quickly into the room and close up to him, her two hands clasped closely together.

"Jacques," she asked, "where is René?"

"Where is René?" she insisted, breathless and vaguely terrified.

"We've been betrayed," was all he said.

"Betrayed?" she murmured. "What do you mean? How? By whom?"

"By you, probably," he retorted harshly.

"You are mad, Jacques."

"Mad? Perhaps I am. I did feel that my reason tottered when I realised that we were betrayed."

He staggered a little, seemed to reel backwards; his sun-tanned cheeks took on a kind of grey look. Indeed, he looked like a man on the verge of collapse. Instinctively, Félice put her hands out to help steady him. He pulled himself up violently, and, before she could prevent it, he had seized both her hands, held them so tightly against him that she could have screamed with pain.

"If I really thought it was you . . ." he began, and now there really was a look of the infuriated wild beast about him. He cast her hands away from him; seemed determined to regain his self-control. There was a half empty mug on the table, and he drank down its contents eagerly. A strong smell of raw spirit pervaded the airless room. Cottereau met the girl's glance of disgust and a dark flush at once spread over his face and up to the roots of his hair.

"If you knew what I've been through," he muttered.

"Tell me what has happened," she rejoined coolly.

At once he turned, and in his usual restless way started pacing up and down the room with shaggy head bent and clenched fists thrust in the pockets of his breeches. Now and then he looked up and cast lowering glances on Félice. She was terrified now, terrified because of René.

"Jacques," she insisted again, "you must tell me. Where is René?"

"*Nom de nom!* If I knew . . ."

"What do you mean? . . . If you . . . Don't you know?" Félice's voice had become shrill in its note of awful anxiety. "For God's sake, Jacques, speak like a man . . . can't you see . . . ?"

"Yes!" he retorted sullenly, "I can see that your thoughts are all for your brother. You have none for the King, for me, for the Cause . . . You had no thought of what this betrayal means to all of us, what? If it was you . . ."

"I have betrayed nothing," she broke in firmly, "and now go on."

"You know what our plans were?"

"Yes!"

"About the Government coach?"

"Yes!"

"And the money? . . . We were to have got 15,000 *écus* in gold . . ."

"You were to have stolen, you mean . . ."

"Did you tell anyone?"

"No."

"Monseigneur? Madame la Marquise?"

"No! No! I have told no one. I have betrayed nothing. Tell me what happened."

"We waited for the coach. It was due through the forest of Glatigny at five o'clock this morning. We waited. It did not come. The men were all ready, their muskets to their hands. All night they had hardly slept for they were keen. But that cursed coach did not come. At six, René suggested that he would go forward and see if he could find out what had happened. I wouldn't let him go alone, so I sent Paul Chatel along with him. Then again we waited. The coach didn't come, and René did not return. You say I am mad . . . I was by then. It was eight o'clock. René had been gone two hours, time for him and Paul to have walked to Le Quesnay and back. I sent Henri and Georges Chatel along . . . to see . . . to ascertain . . . I could not leave the men. They would have been bewildered, lost, if anything happened and I not there. So I sent Paul's two brothers. You understand? They came back in less than an hour, during which, in very truth, I felt that my brain was going, for I was sure by then that we had been betrayed, and most likely by you, Félice. You always disapproved. You never understood. This war in the King's cause cannot be carried on with kid gloves and soft soap. René understood. He knew. He . . ."

"What," she cried, "has happened to René?"

"The three Chatels came back together. Henri and Georges had found their brother in one of the spinneys, half a league up the road out of sight of likely passers-by. He was tied to a tree with a rope, and a scarf—not his—was wound about his mouth. He told Henri and Georges that he and René were walking along the road at a brisk pace when they became aware of two horsemen riding across the field from the direction of Donnay. They seemed to be making for the road. Paul, who was the first to spot them, saw that they had a third, a riderless horse, between them, also that they wore the blue tunics of Bonaparte's mounted police. Obviously, they were a detachment from the usual patrol. As far as René and Paul were concerned they had nothing to fear from them. They were ostensibly casual passers-by, going from Soulanges way to some other village up the road. They slackened their speed and hid the butts of their pistols well under their belts so as to appear as inoffensive as possible. Frankly, Paul said, their

hearts beats a little faster than usual when they perceived that the riders made to strike the road at some distance behind them, and they wondered if their objective was the forest of Glatigny. But their anxiety only lasted a moment, for they soon heard the thud of the horses' hoofs coming in their direction. Again they slackened their pace and then halted and turned, ostensibly to allow the riders to get past them. And then suddenly, without any warning and before they could as much as put their hands to their belts, the riders put their horses on them like an avalanche. Paul was at once knocked down and rolled into the ditch. Before he could recover himself one of the 'Blues' was upon him; a scarf was wound about his head so that he could neither call, nor see, nor hear. Struggle as he might, he was in the grip of some sort of giant who seized him under the armpits and dragged him along at some considerable distance over mud and grass and then through the undergrowth of the spinney. He was utterly helpless by now and could no longer struggle for his life. If the giant had wished to murder him he could easily have done it. As it was, he just felt that he was being bound round with ropes and trussed to a tree, and then he supposed that he lost consciousness, for he remembered nothing more until his brothers came on him and released him. Henri and Georges going along the road had seen suspicious signs of what looked like a struggle, and then a trail which they followed and which brought them to the spinney and to their brother's side."

"But René!" Félice gasped rather than spoke, as Cottereau paused at last after that long peroration because his throat was dry and he could not go on. He poured himself out another glass of spirit and raised it to his lips, but Félice was on him in a trice; she snatched the mug out of his hand and dashed it to the ground.

"René!" she cried wildly. "Where is he?"

Cottereau gave a shrug of his broad shoulders and then laughed. It was a bitter, a cruel laugh, harsh and ironical. With slow deliberation he picked up the mug, refilled it and drank.

"Cottereau," Félice commanded once more, trying in vain to steady her voice, "where is René?"

"I've told you already," he replied curtly. "I do not know." Then he added, "Who should know better than you?"

"I?"

"Yes, you! Félice de Marillac, traitor to the King's cause."

"You are crazy, I say. Where is René?"

Cottereau stretched his huge bulk to its full height and stood

there like a ferocious tiger prepared to spring. After a moment he began speaking very slowly, his voice hoarse with passion :

"You may not have betrayed us willingly, Félice, but you did it nevertheless. We ascertained after a time that the Government coach had been driven round to Soulanges by a long detour, obviously in order to avoid Glatigny. What do you make of that? I say that obviously someone had warned the driver and his escort that we were lying in wait for them. If it was not you——"

"It was not I!"

"Then it was that accursed English spy who should before now have been shot at sight."

Félice had need of all her presence of mind not to utter the cry which had sprung to her throat. Until this moment she had hardly dared to connect the failure of Cottereau's nefarious plan with milor's interference. Could he indeed have had something to do with the warning which apparently had reached the driver of the Government coach just in time? It was a bold move worthy of his reckless spirit, and all might have been well but for the terrible adventure which had befallen René.

"René," Cottereau said with deliberate emphasis, "was waylaid by minions of the police at the instigation of that English spy."

"It is false!" she cried involuntarily.

"And," he went on, not heeding her interruption, "he is at the present moment in the hands of Bonaparte's gendarmes."

"It's not true! You don't know. . . . You have said so yourself."

"Where else is he?" Cottereau continued harshly. "Paul saw them: two men in blue, not the usual patrol, only a detachment. Too few to be after us in the forest; there was no time to collect a larger force, and the usurper's gendarmes are chary of meeting us unless they are vastly superior in number. But the English spy put them on the track of René—René de Marillac, most precious of hostages! He was watched all night by the spy. I know he was. I am as convinced of it as that I am alive. He was watched and tracked and betrayed. It was an opportunity too good to miss, and the English spy sold René to the police. How else could they have got on his track, save through that damned Englishman? I ought never to have let him go. But I never thought—I never guessed . . . And now they've got him and they'll hold him as hostage for the surrender of Jacques Cottereau."

"That is false," she protested hotly, "false, do you hear? It is mad, fantastic . . ."

"How else," he retorted, "do you account for the arrest of René? A spy followed his movements, I say, and there is only one

spy working against us in these parts: the Englishman. He was suborned in England to work on Monseigneur against me."

"His Majesty the King——" Félice began, trying to interrupt his ravings, but he would not let her speak. He brought his clenched fist with a crash upon the table.

"I say that he was suborned to work against me," he went on with a savage oath. "I care not by whom. All my efforts, all my devotion, all the sacrifices I have made in their cause is as nothing to those weak-kneed, supine Bourbons. They are frightened of their own shadows, they hardly dare move for fear of compromising their absurd dignity——"

"Hold on, Cottereau," Félice broke in, with indomitable energy this time. "I'll not listen to such disloyalty."

She turned, determined to leave this half-crazed creature to his own ravings, but already he had guessed her purpose and was at the door even before she could reach it. He seized the cords of the drawbridge and put his whole weight on the rusty pulleys. The next moment the bridge was up, blocking the door; the room in semi-darkness.

Cottereau stood with his back to the door, towering against it like a very statue of fury, and looking down with rage and scorn on the delicate, upturned face of the young girl, with the blue eyes returning contempt for scorn and defiance for menace.

"You have indeed taken leave of your senses, Jacques Cottereau," Félice said calmly, "please let me pass."

"You are not going till you've heard what I've got to say," Cottereau rejoined with a harsh laugh. "First, about that English spy. Oh! I see well enough that he has cajoled you as he has cajoled Monseigneur. God help me, but mayhap he has even dared to make love to you while he carried on his filthy work in the dark. No spy, you think? Then tell me why he came hither like a thief in the night? Why did he come nosing round trying to find Monseigneur's hiding-place? If he was not suborned, why did he come? What has he to do with us or we with him?"

"Cottereau," Félice said with cool indifference, "will you please let me pass?"

"So! you will not listen to a word against the Englishman. Is that it? *Sacré nom d'un chien*, does that mean . . . ?"

He came a step or two forward, and as instinctively she retreated he followed her across the room until she could go no farther and remained standing up against the wall, still defiant and never so fearless as now.

The small window gave on the west and the golden light of

this lovely spring afternoon outlined her small head and the aureole of her hair. Never, perhaps, had she looked so beautiful, never so desirable to this rough, self-willed boor who for the past two years had so framed his whole life that one day he might win her. The King of France and the cause of the Bourbons were but the stepping-stones on which he had stood all along in order the more easily to reach her. But she had been as elusive as his dreams of grandeur. For her he had schemed and planned, robbed and pillaged and even murdered, so that one day he, as the king-maker, could stand before her and say :

"Take me, for now I am worthy of you. The King owes his throne to me, and that debt he can never repay; but you can repay it for him by giving yourself to me." On this last enterprise he had set his every hope, for the want of money had been the stumbling-block to all his schemes. Fifteen thousand golden *écus* would have kept his irregular army going for at least another year. And one year in the history of France could mean so much when events moved as rapidly as they had done in the last decade. This morning's failure had embittered his soul, for it had given him the first premonition of defeat. To him, Jacques Cottereau! who had erased the word "defeat" from his lexicon! But suddenly, in this darkest hour of his humiliation and disappointment there came this golden ray of light: Félice, more beautiful, more exquisite than she had ever been, for she was angered, and a woman angered is more desirable to a man of Cottereau's temperament than the mild, submissive creature of most men's dreams.

"How beautiful you are, Félice," he murmured. "I have always pictured you like this," he continued, murmuring almost inaudibly in his beard, "standing close to me—you and I alone somewhere where no one can find us, where I can at last tell you without fear of others hearing how madly I have loved you, ever since that morning—you remember?—when poor little Alain died and you called God's curse down upon us all. . . . Well, your curse has borne fruit . . . We have not been over-successful so far, have we?"

"Because your souls are steeped in evil?" Félice said, speaking slowly and steadily. "You know that well enough, Jacques. You set out two years ago with a crime upon your conscience . . ."

"It was an accident, I swear it was!"

"Well, perhaps! But since then? What has your rule been but one of terror? How many wives were widowed by your hand? How many mothers have you left to mourn their sons?"

"My thoughts and actions are all for the King. I do what I feel

to be right, even though many may suffer. And I have worked and planned alone, remember, with no one to counsel me."

"Saints in Heaven couldn't do that, Jacques. You are wilful and obstinate. . . ."

"Wilful—yes! And obstinate? I'll prove it to you now. You say that saints in heaven could not counsel me. Perhaps you are right. But *you* could, Félice. My love for you is so strong, so great, that at a word from you I would bend my will entirely to yours. What you commanded I would do. What you condemned I would reject. Hand-in-hand we would work for the King and our cause. Just think to what giddy heights we would attain! There need be no limit to our aims as there would be none to our ambition. I would make you the highest lady in the land, second only to the Queen, and you——"

"You are raving, Cottereau," Félice broke in at last after vainly trying more than once to stem the flow of the man's impassioned tirade.

"Raving, am I?" he retorted. "Does a man rave because he tells a woman that he loves her beyond all things on earth? Do I rave because I tell you that I have set my heart and soul, my very life on having you for my wife, on holding you against my breast, on feeling your beautiful head resting against my body, on burying my face in your golden hair . . ."

"Yes, raving, Cottereau," she said, still speaking coolly and with a steady voice, though God alone knew that for the first time in her life a nameless terror had struck a chill to her heart. He had come closer and closer to her so that she was forced to hold her head back right against the wall, lest his hot breath struck against her face. "Yes, raving!" she reiterated firmly, "for you must know that never—do you hear me?—never will I consent to be your wife."

"Why not?"

"Because I do not love you : that is all."

The words did let loose the floodgates of his passion. He talked and he talked, jumbling his words together, getting more and more indistinct as the potency of the amount of spirit which he had drunk gradually overclouded his brain. Félice did not catch the meaning of half the sentences which gushed out of his mouth like an unshackled stream. All she could do was to stare at him and to try, try with all her might not to lose her nerve, to remain outwardly cool, unmoved, scornful, even though the rapid beating of her heart nearly choked her. She knew that soon, within the next few seconds perhaps, she would be on the defensive,

pitting her woman's wit and woman's efforts against the ferocity of this uncontrolled and passionate male. And she prayed as she had never prayed before for God's guidance and His help.

The very next moment she needed both as she had never needed them before. Cottereau seized her in his arms and pressed her against his breast, his bearded face was so close to her that she only saw it as through a mist, his ardent words came like a confused murmur to her ear :

"Let me teach you how to love, Félice. You are a child, you do not understand. It is all a mystery to you still—a secret room into which you have never entered. But I have the key—I'll show you. . . . I'll teach you, and then you will know what Paradise is like."

His great strong hands wandered up to her head, forced her to turn it and to look at him.

"Give me but one kiss, Félice—your first lesson—and then you will know . . ."

Her feeble hands pressed against him, against his breast, his face. She was so very feeble, so utterly helpless in the arms of this powerful brute. Now at last a wild fear seized her. She would have screamed only that she was choking. Her eyes, wide-open and horror-filled, stared in an agony of terror into that hated face. She pressed her lips tightly together; she held her breath. In her anguish she hoped that she would fall dead at his feet.

One thing alone gave her a respite from that dreaded kiss. She was so beautiful in her terror and her helplessness that the man seemed to gloat on the mere sight of her, conscious of his power and certain of victory. He revelled in the anticipation of his joy, and savoured the delight of this self-imposed torture of putting off, second by second, the supreme bliss for which he craved. He was silent now : no words escaped his lips.

Suddenly, right through the stillness, there resounded the melancholy cry of the screech-owl. Three times it resounded, at intervals of a few seconds, and each time more prolonged . . . almost it seemed more insistent. Already, at the second call, Cottereau's hold on the girl relaxed. Instinctively, almost unknowingly, he listened. Up went his head and the glow of passion in his eyes slowly gave place to one of acute tension and then of vague alarm. The rallying cry of the Chouans thrice repeated meant immediate danger. At the third call Cottereau released his hold on Félice and ran to the door. With a vigorous jerk on the pulleys he lowered the drawbridge and was out in the open, while she, giddy and sick, sank half unconscious to the floor.

CHAPTER XXXVII

THE radiant glow of late afternoon lay over the woodland height, glinted on the bare branches of the trees and outlined the rugged trunks with beams of shimmering gold. Jacques Cottereau, coming straight out of the semi-darkness, blinked in the dazzling flood of light. Soundlessly, as was his wont, he crossed the lowered bridge. Two or three men came out of the thicket.

"What is it?" Cottereau asked under his breath.

"A man come from Donnay. He says——"

"Where is he?" Cottereau broke in impatiently.

The others pushed forward a man who had been standing behind them.

"This is Jacques Cottereau," one of them said curtly to the man, who appeared awed at sight of the well-known Chouan leader. He looked like one almost exhausted with fatigue. His face, his hair, his hands and feet were covered with mud, bits of brush-wood, catkins and burrs clung to his clothes, which only consisted of a tattered shirt tucked into coarse linen trousers. There was an ugly gash across his forehead from which blood had trickled down the side of his face. His hair, lank and moist, hung in matted tails down to his eyes.

"Who are you?" Cottereau queried curtly. "Where do you come from?"

"I am from over Plancy way," the man murmured in reply. "I am Adrien Ruffet. You do not remember me, Cottereau?"

"Ruffet? . . . Ruffet? . . . No, I do not remember."

"I was with you in 1800: that first night when we went recruiting—the château de la Villorée. . . . Don't you remember?"

"I do; but I can't remember every name. . . . You were of the party?"

"Yes. It was my gun that went off and killed young Alain."

"Yours? Ruffet . . . ? Ruffet . . . ? I don't remember the name, but they told me that the man who killed the boy was afterwards shot—accidentally—by old Matthieu, the man up at the château."

"Matthieu swore that he would shoot me on sight," the man went on grimly. "He had more than one try, but I thought he would surely get me one day, so I left this country-side. I've been fighting in Brittany with Georges Cadoudal, but my mother is old and ailing. . . . I wanted to see her and I would rather fight here than there, so I came back."

"When?"

"I left Montfort two weeks ago and I've made or begged my

way on foot since then. My mother lives the other side of Plancy. It was when I went through Donnay that I heard——”

“What?”

“It was at the Cheval Noir. They had allowed me to sleep in the barn. The *cabaret* was full of ‘Blues.’ I heard some of them discuss a raid they were planning on this very tower. They seemed sure of running Jacques Cottereau to earth—those were their words——”

“What else?”

“They talked of an English spy . . .” The man suddenly paused, seemed to shrink into himself, and through the matted strands of his hair cast furtive glances at Cottereau, who at mention of the English spy had uttered an exclamation which sounded like the smothered cry of an infuriated beast.

“Go on!” he muttered hoarsely. “What else?”

“The spy seemed to know for certain that this tower is one of the rallying points of your army. He assured the captain of the Blues that you would in all probability be here this coming night.”

“And so the raid is planned for to-night?”

“Yes—at midnight. The spy undertook to act as guide for the troop . . . I saw the captain give him money . . . I heard them speak, too, of René de Marillac . . . I understood that he is a prisoner in the hands of the Blues. They talked of taking him to Caen after the raid . . .”

Once more the man paused. This time his furtive eyes did not rest on the Chouan chief, but were fixed beyond him, beyond the moat in the direction of the tower. The other men, too, were looking that way and their faces expressed stupor first and then dismay. Cottereau swung round to follow their glance. Félise was in the doorway. She was just on the point of stepping on the bridge. From the expression on her face, the agonised look in her eyes, it was obvious that she had heard. Cottereau’s first thought was to intercept her. He had her there in the tower; he would not let her go. Before she could take another step forward he was across the bridge, in the doorway, compelling her to retreat.

“I am going to Donnay to find René. Let me go, Jacques,” she commanded.

He paid no attention to her. She tried to get past him, but could not. Standing with his arms akimbo, his legs apart, his huge bulk blocked the narrow door. He did not attempt to seize hold of her again: he just allowed her to command, to ask, to entreat, while he shrugged and jeered.

“Let me go to René, Jacques . . .”

"You can do no good," he said roughly. "What can you do? That damned spy has sold him to Bonaparte's police—he is under arrest. Nothing but force will drag him out of their clutches."

"Even so, I must get to him. Let me go, Jacques!" And she added with a note of pitiful pleading, "When I have seen him I'll come back . . . I promise . . . I'll come back . . ."

"You promise?" he ejaculated with a coarse, cruel laugh. "I know what a woman's promise is worth. Made when she fears, it is broken as soon as danger is past."

And suddenly he assumed a tone of command: "You'll stay here, Félice, till we return. I and the men will bring René back to you, or leave our bones to moulder at the bottom of this hill."

"What are you going to do?"

"Forewarned is forearmed: you know that, Félice. It won't be the first time that we have intercepted the police."

"That wouldn't bring René back . . ."

"It will bring that cursed spy under my hand. . . . You heard what the man said? He is to guide the 'Blues.' He was getting paid for that, and for selling your brother's life. . . ."

"It's not true . . ." she protested.

"Do you think the man lied?" he sneered.

"I don't know."

"Well, you'll know for certain to-night. Till then you'll wait here, Félice."

"I am going to find René . . ."

"And your lover, I suppose. . . . Oh, I know now! I was a fool not to guess it before. . . . Now I know. You, already half a traitor, have given yourself to that abominable spy. It is not René you want to find: it is the Englishman, your lover. You helped him to betray us. You hoped to bargain with his help over René. I can see it in every line of your face. I can hear it in your voice when you defend him. Well, you are *not* going to him. I have marked you down for my own. You belong to me, do you understand? I hold you here now as my property, and here you remain until I drag that miserable spy to your feet and pull his filthy tongue out of his mouth, and kill him before your eyes, inch by inch."

Of course the man was not sane. The failure of his big *coup*, and after that the spirit which he had drunk had further addled his brain; but as he stood there, huge and indomitable and fierce like a raging tiger, even Félice's intrepid spirit quailed before this new danger which now threatened her. Not for a moment did she believe the man's fantastic assertion that my lord was a paid spy

who had sold her brother to the police. As soon would she have believed that the sun could stay its course in the heavens. What she did believe, however, more firmly than ever now, was that he would make a desperate attempt to get to her, and that in so doing he could not fail to fall in the hands of this savage creature whose vindictiveness and hatred would stop neither at outrage nor murder. Even now the words were hardly out of his mouth when in an instant he stepped back from the door and pulled it to behind him. She was imprisoned in the semi-darkness. Only a few confused sounds came to her from the outside: Cottereau's voice calling to his men, then sunk to a whisper and speaking rapidly. After that he must have crossed the bridge, for his voice died away as if in the distance, but other sounds came to the anxious girl's ears, sounds that struck a deadly chill to her heart. She crept to the door, pulled it open an inch or two, and peeped out. Her ears had not deceived her. What she saw justified her terror. Cottereau stood on the other side of the moat. He was directing the men who, armed with axes, were busy breaking up the bridge. The man from Montfort was among them. He worked with a will, as did the others. In five minutes the old tower stood isolated from the surrounding land. The deep moat with its sheer sides and slimy bottom was impassable to all except to those hardy sons of the soil, and the unfortunate girl was now in very truth a captive.

Then at last she felt her spirit broken: the tension had been too great, and her nerves seemed all of a sudden to snap. She slid down on her knees and buried her face in her hands. Great sobs shook her aching body, and wild snatches of prayers mixed with heartrending groans came through her trembling lips.

CHAPTER XXXVIII

It took Martin Saint-Denys an hour and more after he parted from Félise de Marillac in the chapel of La Villorée to collect his thoughts and to clear them sufficiently so that he might formulate some plan by which he could best serve his beloved lady, as he had sworn to her that he would.

The first duty that lay before him was to put a spoke in Cottereau's wheel in the matter of his proposed attack on the Government coach and its load of gold: on the success of this undertaking hung René's fate, not to mention Monseigneur's departure for England.

If only time had not been so damnably short !”

After due reflection, then, Martin decided that his first objective must be Donnay, where once before he had been in touch with a number of Bonaparte's mounted police. By dint of cajoling, bribery and vague hints of an important service to be rendered to Monseigneur, he persuaded Pierre to let him have a couple of Madame la Marquise's horses, which he swore he would only use for a short ride and faithfully return within twenty-four hours. Pierre had no reason to suspect an honoured guest in Madame's house of evil intent. Had this foreigner not actually arrived at the château in the company of Monseigneur himself? And Pierre was poor : he had a wife and a number of children. The bribe freely offered by this amiable milor would be extremely welcome at home. Pierre accepted it, gave the promise of secrecy, saddled a couple of horses, and soon Martin and his priceless Bunch were on their way to Donnay.

As Saint-Denys had expected, there were a number of Bonaparte's police in their blue uniform, eating and drinking in the *Cabaret du Cheval Noir*. To these men an English traveller was not an object of suspicion. They were lively fellows, not over-enamoured of this perpetual hunt after elusive and treacherous Chouans, and glad enough of the company of a pleasant foreigner who would talk and chaff with the best of them, and help to while away the time. The perfect Bunch had so cleaned and tidied his master's only suit of clothes that his lordship did, in fact, look presentable enough, and he was soon in parley with two of the officers : with the help of more than one choice bottle of wine from the landlord's cellar he had them presently in rare good humour.

In one of his chapters of his "Indiscretions," Lord Saint-Denys gives an amusing account of his adventures both in the *Cheval Noir* at Donnay, and immediately afterwards. Speaking of his parley with the two officers of the "Blues" he says :

"How I succeeded in persuading them to let me have the two blue uniform coats, which I required for my purpose, is still a marvel to me. My gentlemen must have been very drunk at the time that I started bargaining for these coats, as I am sure that they had no right whatever to part with them. Indeed, I understood that they were their own second-best coats, and what lies I told them of the purpose for which I required them, I really cannot remember."

After that there came the question of horses : two to be returned to Mme. la Marquise's stables at La Villorée, and two

others, if possible, to be hired for the arduous adventure on which his lordship was now about to embark.

Luckily the landlord had three old nags in his stables: they were fairly miserable-looking beasts, and vaguely suspecting that one or the other might go lame before it had gone very far, Saint-Denys took the three and paid the man a liberal sum for their use, leaving the question of Madame's horses to resolve itself on the morrow.

By the time the nags were saddled and his lordship and his faithful Bunch well on their way once more, it was close on midnight. Their objective was Le Quesnay, where the driver of the Government coach was to spend the night before proceeding to Caen by way of the Glatigny woods, where Cottereau and his band lay in wait for him. The way to Le Quesnay lay across ploughed fields; dressed in the blue coats borrowed from the police officers, the two horsemen rode along at none too slow a pace. They had the third nag between them on the lead: and had strapped their own coats to its saddle, together with a couple of bags of fodder for the beasts. Fortunately the waning moon presently rose above the distant hills and flooded the country-side with its pale, mysterious light.

Arrived at Le Quesnay, they drew rein at the principal inn, roused the landlord, and in the name of the Commandant of Police of the district demanded to speak with the driver of the Government coach.

"The poor man was duly dragged out of his bed," says his lordship in his "Indiscretions"; "and we gave him the supposed orders of the commandant that he was to drive the coach to Caen by way of Donnay and not through the Glatigny woods and Soulanges as originally planned. His escort, which consisted of three troopers and a corporal, were given the same orders, and I remember thinking at the time what a very inadequate escort for such a large sum of money, and in view of the disturbed state of the country, these four men were, although, of course, they were well armed and very well mounted. However, that was no business of mine. All I had to concentrate on at the moment was the effect of light on my person. I wanted my blue officer's coat to be seen by the troopers, but not my nether garments, which were my own. The moon being behind the trees that flanked the house, and as the only artificial light there was came from a dim dark lantern which the landlord swung in his hand, Bunch, who is always understanding, was able to keep well in the shadows, and so was I."

"The troopers stood to attention, as did the driver and the landlord, as Bunch and I rode away. So far I had been successful in my errand, and I thought this of good augury. Cottereau's criminal plan was bound now to end in smoke, and the anxiety of my beloved lady for her somewhat worthless brother would, at any rate for the time being, be allayed."

Never, perhaps, in all his life had Martin Saint-Denys so enjoyed an adventure. Every hour of the day and night there was something to do, something to plan, some exciting experience to go through. Even at the present moment, when the two most difficult tasks which the gay adventurer had imposed on himself were successfully accomplished, there was the longing to see what his enemy Cottereau would do when he realised that he had been balked in his great enterprise, and that the Government coach was not coming his way. No small matter to be thus done out of 15,000 *écus*! And then again there was the passionate desire to come across René de Marillac at the time when the band of marauders, realising their defeat, would finally disperse.

It must be supposed that by now Martin Saint-Denys was banking on his luck. Everything had gone so well with him during this last twenty-four hours, he could not imagine that anything he undertook now could possibly go wrong. He and Bunch were now on the road along which the Government coach would presently have travelled, had Martin not interfered. The moon was bright, and the thick dark belt of trees of the forest of Glatigny cut across the horizon line a couple of leagues ahead. Leaving the road, the two horsemen now struck across some ploughed fields on their right, as Saint-Denys's intention was to leave Bunch and the horses at some convenient spot, and then to penetrate the thicket and to explore the forest as far as he could with the hope of getting in touch with some of Cottereau's gang, and, if humanly possible, with René de Marillac.

Thus another hour went by. The two men were riding over fields all the time, keeping the belt of forest trees ahead of them, but gradually more and more to their left.

"I didn't worry much," Lord Saint-Denys relates, "about our being heard or actually seen by the Chouans; no one except the military or the police would have horses to ride in this district, and the marauders were not likely to come out in the open in order to attack us when they were expecting the Government coach to come along shortly."

On the extreme edge of a field, facing a narrow lane, the riders presently came on a derelict bit of masonry, one of those ruined

cottages so often seen in different parts of France. Here they drew up and dismounted. It was an ideal spot wherein to tend the horses and give them food, and Martin charged his faithful Bunch to see to this, and then to wait quietly until one hour before the dawn, when he was to bring the horses to within a quarter of a mile of the edge of the forest, and wait again until his lordship joined him there. Having given Bunch these instructions, Martin took off the blue uniform coat, divested himself of his boots and stockings, and started on foot down the lane in the direction of the forest of Glatigny. Not with a line, a glance or a twitch did the perfect gentleman's gentleman show what he thought of his lordship wandering bare-foot and in his shirt in this God-forsaken bit of continental Europe, where some kind of uncivilised Frenchman had given his followers orders to shoot my lord Saint-Denys on sight. Perhaps he didn't think anything at all, being, so to speak—as he would have told you himself—accustomed to his lordship's eccentric ways; nor would he have dared to suggest caution to one whose whole life had been spent in risking and defying death.

The first belt of forest trees was not distant a half-league or so, and the lane led directly to it. It was a sheer bit of luck that soon after Martin started to trudge along in that direction, a benevolent cloud should have veiled the face of the moon. After the brilliant light of a while ago, the night seemed suddenly pitch-dark, but the lane was bordered by a row of pollarded willows, and Saint-Denys was thus able to grope his way along without fear of going off the track. But now he had to be wary of the Chouans, for he was on foot, and knew that these Normandy peasants and fisher-folk had a marvellous faculty for scenting from afar the approach of an enemy. What he did hope, however, was that under cover of darkness, he might pass for one of themselves. As soon as he reached the wood, he dropped on his hands and knees, and began crawling through the undergrowth. Everything around was very still, but through that very stillness the adventurer's ears perceived the faint sound of stertorous breathing of men asleep.

A moment or two later a husky voice sent out the challenge:

"*Qui va là?*"

"Legros!" Martin gave answer boldly.

He crawled on a little farther until he found a clump of brush-wood high and dense enough to hide him effectually. Here he remained listening and expectant.

For the next hour or two he lay in his *cache*, very still, conscious

made some remark. We exchanged a few words, and then I slouched away, never once looking back. Obviously to these men any passer-by who looked such a thorough ruffian as I did then could only be one of themselves. They let me pass, and I went on, but I had not gone far before a musket shot rang out from behind me. I felt a sharp hit in the fleshy part of my thigh, and the bullet that inflicted it went and buried itself in the nearest tree. I suppose that the men had put their heads together as soon as my back was turned, and decided that whether I was acting under Cottereau's order or no, a dead man was less dangerous than a live one. The morning mist, which was fairly dense here in the hollow, saved me from getting that bullet in the middle of my back, and before those pleasant gentlemen could take another aim I had taken to my heels. They didn't run after me, as it happened. I dare say they did not think it worth while to pursue such a miserable wreck of humanity as I was. Needless to say, I was not yet conscious of any pain in my leg, and within the next two hundred yards or so I spied Bunch coming towards me.

"He had found an excellent covert shelter for the horses at the bottom of a declivity and behind a clump of thorny acacias, and there he had been waiting for the past two hours, until the musket shot made him fear for my safety, and he ran up the declivity and along the lane. There was no time to say much to him. A priceless fellow, Bunch! You never have to explain anything in detail: he always understands. And he is such an old campaigner, he always knows what to do with a flesh wound. Mine was a slight one, and one sleeve of his shirt supplied the necessary bandage. Off we were once more after that, with our blue coats on again this time, and boots on our feet, pushing our nags up the rising ground as fast as they could go in the direction of the derelict cottage whence I knew we could command a view right across the fields to the main Soulanges-Le Quesnay road. I had fully made up my mind that Cottereau would agree to René de Marillac going scouting for him. He was the man least likely to excite suspicion, or to be stopped by the police patrol. His connection with Cottereau's band of brigands was not officially known, nor did his appearance and tidy clothing suggest the ruffianly Chouan.

"As we reached the higher ground the mist completely disappeared, and when we reached the derelict cottage we spied on the road, half a league away, two men walking in the direction of Le Quesnay. I pointed them out to Bunch and all I said was: 'You knock one man over into the ditch, no matter which one, and I'll tackle the other.' We then put our nags to a gallop across

the field. It was not difficult to overtake the two men, as the road at that point winds round the fields like a ribbon. I spotted René de Marillac immediately, and rode straight for him. The two of them had stopped in order to let us pass; Bunch made for the one man and rolled him into the ditch, while I performed the same act of grace for Monsieur le Vicomte de Marillac de la Villorée. I wished I had not been forced to knock his head into unconsciousness, but this I had to do for his security as well as for our own. When he lay there, in the ditch, with his eyes closed and his fair hair all tumbled about his brow, he looked so like his sister that I was sorely tempted to kiss him on the brow. He looked such a child!

"Briefly, I ordered Bunch to muzzle his victim with his scarf, and then to drag him under cover to the spinney which loomed in the near distance a hundred yards away, and there to secure him to a tree with his leather belt. He performed this office, I noticed, with much satisfaction, not being greatly enamoured of these sanguinary Chouans. When he returned we lifted René into the saddle. I took his bridle and put my arm round him, and the three of us then ambled slowly back across the fields."

CHAPTER XXXIX

It is in another chapter of his "Indiscretions" that Lord Saint-Denys relates his final adventure with Jacques Cottereau and his Chouans. "A joyful adventure" he calls it more than once, and declares that never for one moment did he regret having set foot in this disturbed and distressful corner of France.

"As for ennui," he goes on to say, "I had forgotten the very meaning of the word. Never were five thousand pounds of a ruined English gentleman's money more happily expended. With my arm round René de Marillac, his bridle in my hand and his horse ambling beside mine, my dream in the forest of Glatigny was being realised. What I wanted to do now was to put my beloved lady's favoured brother permanently out of reach of Cottereau's baneful influence. While we rode back in the direction of the derelict cottage, I collected my wits together and settled on a plan of action. My desire was to get René to Calvaert, the coastal town where dwelt the amiable smuggler of whom the Duc de Berry had spoken with such confidence. To-day, or at latest to-morrow, the courier who had been sent from La Villorée to Calvaert would return with the news that there was a ship in port on

which the Duke could set sail for England, and I soon made up my mind that René should sail with the Duke.

"How to accomplish that was something of a puzzle, for René was obstinate and at this juncture his every instinct of chivalry would be aroused through the failure of Cottereau's *coup*. While he was in any uncertainty about the fate of the Chouan leader and his horde he would flatly refuse to leave the country. Knowing that, I quickly rejected my original idea, which was to take René straight back to La Villorée. It was by stratagem that he must be got to Calvaert. Roughly speaking, I knew in which direction the town lay. I remembered our wanderings at the outset of our adventure, when, starting from the *Chat qui saute*, we went in search of the château of the mysterious Madame la Marquise, and I reckoned that we had not less than eight to nine leagues to traverse before we reached the coast. This, of course, could not be thought of with our miserable tired mounts and with the short time at our disposal for all that remained to be done. René by now was returning to consciousness. Once or twice he had stirred and looked up at me. I still had my arm round him, and when his eyes rested on my blue coat he quickly closed them again. He had no doubt, I suppose, that he had been arrested and was being conveyed to the nearest town, preparatory to being sent to Caen for trial. Though not a word came through his lips, I was sure that he was longing to ask what had become of Cottereau and the men. But we rode on in silence, I steadily making for the cross-road which, passing through the valley of the Orne at the foot of the range of hills on which was perched La Villorée, wound its way through one or two townships and villages as far as the coast.

"Thus presently we came on Tilly, a small town distant some two leagues from La Villorée. Here we drew up at a small inn on the outskirts of the town. I chose it because it was a miserable-looking place, with apparently only a slatternly, middle-aged woman in charge of it. She came to the door in response to a call from me; three very dirty children of various sizes clung to her skirts. I saw that she was on the point of refusing to let us in, but she caught sight of our blue coats and quickly changed her tune. Her husband, she said, was absent, working at Evreux, from which I gathered that he was really one of Cottereau's gang. At any rate, that was the impression the woman made upon me. Of course all this suited me very well. We all dismounted, and while Bunch put up the horses in the barn at the back of the house, I ordered René to follow me into the common room. He was obviously still under the belief that he was under arrest, and I was

thankful that he had never actually set eyes on me previous to this adventure so that I was able to keep up the deception.

"We made the woman get us some food, which probably we could not have eaten had we not been so famished. I then left Bunch in charge of our 'prisoner' to await my return, however late in the day this might occur, and, carrying my own coat in a bundle under my arm, I went into the town in search of a fresh horse. Here my blue uniform proved of considerable service. There was quite a good-sized *cabaret* in the centre of the town, and the landlord, believing me to be a member of the police force, did not dare to refuse to supply me with the mount I required. I then started, hell for leather, for Calvaert. Once in the open country I changed into my own coat, which, for obvious reasons, I thought would serve me best. The name of the amiable smuggler mentioned by the Duc de Berry had fortunately stuck in my mind. As soon as I arrived in Calvaert I inquired after Monsieur Caron, and though I had some difficulty in finding him, I finally ran him to earth in a poky little office in a back street close to the port.

"For credentials I still had the ring which Monsieur Legros had given me. I had kept it all this time with my money in the leather wallet in my belt. I explained to Monsieur Caron the purport of my visit. Monseigneur le Duc de Berry, I said, desired to set sail for England immediately. Would there be a ship available for his journey? There always was, the obliging smuggler assured me, Monseigneur had only to command. I got him to write a letter to that effect, which I would immediately take to the lady under whose roof His Royal Highness was even now in hiding. I then rode back as far as Tilly, satisfied myself that René and Bunch were all safe, transformed myself once more into a disreputable vagabond, and set out on foot for La Villorée. It was a matter of four miles, or so.

"At the gate of the château, Matthieu took the letter from me. I went round to the stables and waited there in patience, quite pleased that Pierre did not seem to have the least suspicion that I was the same milor who had parleyed with him the day before and borrowed two of Madame la Marquise's horses. In his eyes I was obviously only a scrubby villain fit only to sit on a dung-heap and there await Madame or Mademoiselle's pleasure. Soon I had the satisfaction of hearing that Pierre had orders to have the coach ready by two o'clock in the afternoon, in readiness to take Monseigneur le Duc de Berry as far as Calvaert. It was at that happy hour that I had the joy of seeing my beloved lady for a few brief moments. She stood for a time at the main gate waiting for

the coach to draw up. She did not recognise me, of course; indeed she scarcely looked at me, for which I was thankful. If our eyes had met, God knows what might have happened, for mine would surely have spoken to her with such mute eloquence, that she would have guessed who I was. And I wished above all to keep up my disguise until I had seen René safe in Monseigneur's company.

"However, all was well, and presently after much bowing and curtsying and kissing of hands, Monseigneur entered the coach and we started for the coast. I rode on the back of the coach until we approached Tilly. Here the ground rises fairly abruptly, and the poor half-starved horses panted and puffed as they dragged the heavy lumbering vehicle up the incline. I had reckoned on this, as I had already surveyed the ground carefully when I went by earlier in the day. And suddenly I jumped down, ran to the horses' heads and brought them to a standstill. Pierre of course was furious, and lost his temper. He ordered me to let go the horses' bridles, which, of course, I did not do, whereupon he struck at me with his whip. Monseigneur put his august head out of the window to see what was amiss, and this was my opportunity.

"The horses did not like making a fresh start on the hill and kept Pierre and his son busy, while I went to the coach door and, with the aid of M. Legros' ring, revealed my identity to Monseigneur. Within a couple of minutes I had put him in possession of all the facts. René, I said, was in the charge of my servant in the inn yonder; would Monseigneur deign to take charge of him now, and order that foolish lad to accompany him to England where he would certainly be out of mischief? The Duke, as it happens, had been nursing his resentment against Cottereau, and this made him both eager and willing to pluck René out of the burning brand of Chouan influence. I fetched René and brought him before Monseigneur. Never shall I forget the look of joyful surprise that spread over the poor boy's wan face. Quite apart from the love—akin to worship—which men of his family and caste have for the exiled Bourbons, I do think that the abortive adventure of last night, together with all that he had gone through since, had given him much food for thought, and he was thankful thus to be dragged away, ostensibly by force, from his criminal associates.

"Now, though I was burning with impatience to return to La Villorée and bring the joyful news of René's safety to my adored lady, I could not forget the solemn pledge which I gave to Monsieur Legros to see Monseigneur le Duc de Berry safely on his way to England. The actual spirit of the pledge was somewhat difficult

to interpret at this juncture, but nevertheless I felt bound to accompany Monseigneur as far as Calvaert. Never in my life did I see anything quite so funny as Pierre's face when His Royal Highness offered me a seat in the coach, and he saw me get in and sit quite comfortably with the future King of France and Monsieur le Vicomte de Marillac de la Villorée. Nor did I ever in my life feel so satisfied and so relieved when, after a brief interview with Monsieur Caron, I saw Monseigneur the Duc de Berry and René de Marillac step aboard the *Flower of May*. She would set sail for England one hour after sunset, and I stood on the small jetty for a few moments among a crowd of fisher-folk, as disreputable-looking a vagabond as any man anxious to hide his identity could ever hope to be."

CHAPTER XL

"PIERRE drove me back to Tilly where we picked up Bunch," Lord Saint-Denys goes on to say in the next chapter of his "Indiscretions," "and then to within half a mile of La Villorée. It was quite unnecessary to swear him and his son to secrecy. In this part of the country, and in these turbulent days, men quite naturally held their tongues. Bunch and I went on, on foot, to the Château. We had left our blue coats and our own clothes and boots at Tilly, not wishing to be encumbered with them. We were barefoot, ragged and unkempt. The few who passed us by took no notice of us whatever. We were just vagabonds, shoeless and starving like most of the peasants in these hard times.

"At La Villorée a terrible disappointment was in store for me. We saw old Matthieu, who told us that Madame la Marquise was resting, and that Mademoiselle Félice had gone out on foot an hour ago, and he, Matthieu, was not sure when she would return. I pressed him with questions, and finally he agreed that most likely Mademoiselle had gone to the old tower to see if she could glean some news about Monsieur le Vicomte. I confess that when I realised that this was indeed very likely, I became conscious of an icy sickening fear. While engaged in looking after René I had quite lost sight of Jacques Cottereau, whose temper at this moment would be about as mild as that of a hungry tiger bereft of its prey. I felt that I had not a moment to lose and that I must get to my beloved lady in less time than it took to formulate a definite plan. I was just on the point of starting at a run down into the valley, when a thought struck me, a thought which did not fall short of

an inspiration. Mention of the old tower had at once brought to my mind recollections of the many adventures I had lived through in and around its walls, adventures which had their inception and their culmination in surreptitious entrances and exits. This rush of memory caused me to ask old Matthieu if there was such a thing in the château as a rope-ladder. Of course there was, and a stout one, too. I borrowed that, together with a lanthorn, which I thought would be useful, then armed with these things, Bunch and I quickly made our way across the valley. As soon as we had reached the other side we sought a *cache* in the thicket in which to hide our ladder, then, leaving good old Bunch in charge, I climbed up the woodland height. It seemed to me as if the old pile up there frowned upon me and defied me to wrest its secrets and its powers from the Chouan leader who alone held the key to them."

Thus speaks my lord Saint-Denys and Brune of his last adventure. Cottereau had run to earth inside the old tower, and Félice, unsuspecting, had placed herself in his power. Then did the bold plan suggest itself to Martin to play the rôle of the vagrant from Montfort with the whole story of the supposed attack in full force at midnight on Cottereau and his band. "Never," he says, "did I lie for so good a purpose: never did I exert my imagination for the framing of such a likely story. Would that I had not been forced, for the verisimilitude of my tale, to say that René de Marillac was a prisoner in the hands of the Blues, for at that moment I caught sight of my adored lady in the doorway of the tower, and I nearly gave the whole show away, so great was my agony of mind when I beheld her beautiful face distorted with anxiety and sorrow. Thank God! I was able to regain control of myself. I finished my tale which was destined to draw Cottereau and his brigands away from the vicinity of the tower in order to make their preparations for giving a warm welcome to the supposed raiders. To think that whilst my brain was hard at work, devising a plan for the ultimate rescue of my beloved, my hands, at Cottereau's orders, were engaged in demolishing that confounded bridge, and that with each stroke from my axe I must have been dealing a death-blow to her hopes! I pictured her inside that dark tower, captive to that ferocious miscreant, despair gnawing at her heart, her exquisite lips murmuring a last appeal for divine protection."

Indeed, Martin felt that there was no time to lose. Fortunately Cottereau thought so likewise. Satisfied that Félice was in very truth a prisoner, he hastily called the men together, gave them hurried directions, and then, with that furtiveness peculiar to

these Chouans, he and his horde moved away and were soon lost in the thicket. Their objective was Plancy, a good three miles farther up the valley, where according to the supposed man from Montfort the attack was to be launched. As soon as he saw that the coast was clear, Martin ran back down the hillside, found the *cache* where Bunch was keeping guard over the precious rope and the lanthorn, and together the two adventurers made their way as furtively as any Chouan as far as the village of Soulanges and to the rear of the *Cabaret du Pélican*, where they had been attacked by Cottereau's men, and, whilst retreating before vastly superior numbers, had suddenly tumbled headlong down the disused well.

It was now late in the evening, the waning moon was not yet up. Nothing could be more favourable for such an enterprise as my Lord Saint-Denys had in view. They soon found the broken masonry where they had lost their footing, and at once set to work to lower the rope-ladder. Bunch remained at the top to guard this vital exit, and Martin, having lighted his lanthorn, let himself down into the well.

CHAPTER XLI

AND in the dank, circular room of the old tower the last of the afternoon light had vanished. Outside, a faint golden glow still lingered for awhile, but inside it was pitch dark.

Félice had dragged herself to the window. She clutched the iron bar, and dry eyed she gazed out into the gathering gloom. Now and then a convulsive shiver shook her delicate body, but she felt too hopeless now, either to cry or even to pray. In a way she welcomed the darkness, for her eyes ached and her head felt as if encircled by a hard, tight metal band. The darkness held no terrors for her. Her only terror was of the fierce, pitiless creature in whose power she was. She, Félice de Marillac, of the independent and proud spirit, would have to cringe presently to a man whom she hated, but who would by then be holding the lives of two men in his cruel hands—two men who were dear to her: one of them infinitely dear. It was in this darkest hour of her trial that Félice woke to the full consciousness of her love for my lord. She now knew that she had loved him ever since the hour when he stood beside her horse, with the moonlight searching every line of his face and revealing the man's soul in the expression of his eyes. Every word he had ever spoken to her since then came back vividly to her at this hour, when despair whispered in her ear that

she would never see him again. Only forty-eight hours had gone by since that exquisite hour on the grassland by the roadside. Could any woman learn in so short a time that one man alone in the whole world meant life, happiness, eternal bliss to her? A little while ago she would not have believed it possible. But now she knew, and even through the intensity of her misery she was conscious of a strange ecstasy of thought that this beautiful lesson of life had not been denied her.

How long she remained there in a kind of dull stupor she did not know. She heard the church clock of Soulanges strike seven and then eight. After that her faculties became more and more numb. At one time she had wondered if her mother would be as anxious about her as she had been about René, but these were times when mothers, wives, sisters were inured to constant anxious dread about the fate of those they cared for; and patience and resignation had become the cardinal virtues. Even she, Félice herself, young girl though she was, had more than once been forced to roam the country o' nights with messages, warnings, or some other errand to the fighting men. Her mother would spend anxious hours this night, but what was that in face of the events which had been preordained by Destiny, and which relentless Time was bringing nearer and nearer to their fulfilment?

And now the church clock of Soulanges had struck ten, Félice's ears perceived a slight sound somewhere in the room. Infinitely weary, faint, too, for lack of food, she turned her aching head in the direction whence had come the sound. The darkness was intense. She could see nothing. It might have been a mouse, or a bat. She hoped that it was not a rat. But, after all, what did it matter? She was so tired. So tired! She groped with arms outstretched, hoping to encounter a chair. And suddenly she perceived a narrow, dim line of light. It came from somewhere under the floor. She would have been more frightened if she had not been so tired. As it was, she just went back a step, and then another, like a cautious young animal, trying to increase the distance between herself and that narrow, dim line of light in the floor. And then it widened. It widened all of a sudden, even though the light remained dim. And Félice, who knew every nook and cranny of the old tower, saw that the trap-door underneath the stairs was being pushed open. She held her breath, looked and listened. A hand holding a dark lanthorn was thrust up through the trap, then, vaguely illumined by the lanthorn, there came a man's head, his shoulders, his other arm, his legs. . . . A few seconds later she saw the whole of him through the gloom,

and at one moment he so held the lanthorn that she recognised the head and face. It was the man from Montfort, he who had brought the warning of the midnight raid, and had told Cottereau about the "Blues" and about René! He looked even more grimy, more forbidding than before, for a kind of slime covered his legs and feet and some of his clothing.

He put his lanthorn down on the table; it only threw out a very small and very dim circle of light, but a tiny ray fell on the polished edge of a chair, and into this the man sank, as if he were dead-beat. Félice now could only distinguish him very vaguely in the gloom, his broad back and hair plastered to his head by grime. She hardly dared to breathe, wondering what this man was doing here, how he had made his way into the cellar below from the world outside, and what he would do when he saw her. It was the way he had come that puzzled her most; for though, as she well knew, an underground conduit gave on the cellar, that conduit ended in a disused well to which there was no ingress. But what, in Heaven's name, was the man doing here? For a few seconds—minutes perhaps—while this suspense lasted Félice's eyes were fixed on his broad, motionless shoulders and on his hand, which he passed repeatedly across his forehead, pushing back the matted strands of hair. She heard him breathing . . . then yawning. She forgot her fatigue, her terrors, even her despair, while she stood there in the dark and watched.

Suddenly a most unexpected, most amazing sound reached her ear. So amazing, so unexpected was it, that she gave a startled little cry, whereupon the sound was repeated . . . and amplified. It was the sound of a man's voice speaking her name:

"Félice!" it said. And then, after she had given that startled cry, it said again: "Félice," and added, "Sweetheart, you knew I would come to you, didn't you?"

At first she could not realise whence the voice had come. The man with the broad back hadn't moved. Besides . . . But then, where did the voice come from? There was only the man from Montfort here. Was it, then, a spirit voice come to her from the other side, whither souls fly as soon as released?

"I know just where you are, sweetheart," the voice went on; "it would have to be lots darker than this before my eyes failed to find you. But I can't come nearer to you because I am such a disgusting object."

The man from Montfort rose. The light from the lanthorn was very dim, but gradually the pupils of Félice's eyes had narrowed down sufficiently to distinguish some things in this semi-darkness

. . . the outline of the man . . . his head; his hair, which he had pushed away from his forehead. And now, with a shamed little laugh, he rubbed his face vigorously with his hands.

"Heaven's above!" he said lightly, "I believe I have made it worse."

This time she did not cry out, though in very truth she was more startled than before. She could only hold her breath and gaze aghast on what she still believed to be a mere vision of her delirious fancy. He was facing her now, and through the grime she recognised his face. It was so like him, too, to sink slowly down on one knee, and then to say quite gaily and lightly:

"Thank God and all His saints! I have been able to save you!"

There is a gap in Lord Saint-Denys's "Indiscretions," the events of the next few minutes being indicated by a profusion of asterisks. After these, however, there is a short account of the return journey from the old tower to the château de la Villorée, with a glowing appreciation of Mademoiselle de Marillac's courage when engaging in that hazardous journey along the underground conduit and descending and ascending the rope-ladders in the disused well. Despite intense fatigue and want of food, she bravely tackled the walk back to the château, where Matthieu nearly swooned with joy at sight of her, and even Madame la Marquise showed signs of having suffered from anxiety over the continued absence of her daughter.

But when Félice, standing in the great hall, had received her mother's kiss and had listened to unwonted words of affection, she turned in order to welcome inside her father's château the man to whom she owed more than life, my lord Saint-Denys had disappeared.

CHAPTER XLII

It was in the small hours of the following morning that the whole country-side was awakened from sleep by a terrific explosion, which, for two seconds, lit up the sky with a dazzling, lurid light and flung huge stones and débris of masonry far and wide and to a great height up in the air. Women and children cowered in their beds, thinking either that the end of the world had come, or that the English had landed in Normandy and blown up every ship in every harbour from Havre to Cherbourg. But when they rose at break of day, those who lived nigh saw

that on the wooded height above Soulanges the old tower of La Villorée no longer dominated the valley of the Orne. And anon, their men folk came furtively slinking back to their homes and each one of them had a tale to tell how Jacques Cottereau, in the small hours of the morning, when he had made sure that there was to be no attack by the "Blues" upon his little army, had made his way up to the old tower some five minutes only before the explosion occurred.

What caused the catastrophe no one could say for certain, but some there were who vowed that just before the crash they had seen a man standing on the platform of the tower, waving his arms like a man possessed of a devil. And some said that they had heard cries and shouts and curses that resembled the roars of chained wild beasts.

Félice de Marillac had no thought of the end of the world or of English landing. Almost as soon as she heard the crash she guessed that Jacques Cottereau, baffled in his passion as well as in his ambition, had chosen this dramatic way of ending his life. Well, better so! She could not regret him, or even feel a pang of sorrow for a brave life so shamefully ended. All she could do for the memory of the man was to try and forget the infinite wrong he would have done to her had he lived. The old tower was gone. Some of its débris had been flung as far as the château; the explosion had shattered many a pane of glass. Félice thought of my lord and wondered when she would see him again. It was like him to go away before she could begin to tell him something of what she felt. But surely he would come by and by, perhaps intending to say a final irrevocable "good-bye." But she would not let him go. Not like that. Not without the knowledge that she, Félice de Marillac, had given her whole heart to him. And in the privacy of her own room, with no one to see the glow in her cheeks or the tears in her eyes, she murmured the words which presently she would say to him: "I love you, dear, my lord! I loved you from that heavenly hour when you stood with your arm round Stella's neck and the moon shone on your face, and in your eyes I read the soul of a man who was loyal and true and brave and who already worshipped me!"

All that she would say to him and then dare him to go away. How could he go, when she loved him and begged him to remain? But my lord did not come, even though the hours sped by, and even Maman wondered why he did not come, although she was thankful enough that he and Félice did not meet again. "You must not make too much of a hero of that young adventurer, my

child," Madame la Marquise said quite kindly, but firmly. "Undoubtedly we owe him a good deal, but he had some secret motive for what he did, and what that motive was we shall never know. Whatever it was, he must now go his way. He is nothing to us. He can never be anything to you."

It was close on midday when a boy from Tilly came to the château with a letter for Mademoiselle. A stranger, he said, had given it to him, together with fifty sous to take it to La Villorée immediately. Fortunately, Maman was reciting her rosary in the chapel, and Félise was able to lock herself up in her room in order to read the letter. But before she began she pressed the paper to her cheeks and to her lips, since his hand had rested on it while he wrote. And this is what she read :

Heart of my heart, beloved lady. This is to bid you farewell because I am too great a coward to appear before you ere I go. To see you and not to tell you that I worship you were beyond my power, and if I knelt at your feet, or held you in my arms, I could never again tear myself away. Think of me kindly, beloved lady, even though I am unworthy of your regard. All that Madame la Marquise says about me is quite true—or nearly all. I am just a penniless adventurer and must go my way while you go yours, for I am unworthy to approach you as a suitor for your hand. Your father and mother would scorn me, and justly so. It has been an infinite joy to me to have had the privilege of serving you, and if at any time in the future the happiness should come to me that you again desired my services, I pray you to command me, remembering that the only threads that hold me to life after this are those which bind my memory to you.

The letter was signed "Martin Saint-Denys." When Félise had read it through three times, she dropped her hands with it in her lap. And she sat after that for more than an hour in her room . . . thinking. She didn't cry. This was not the moment for tears. Fortunately Madame la Marquise knew nothing about the letter, so she did not question her, but she did remark how terribly anxious Félise was about her brother. She had no idea, she declared, that Félise could be so unreasonable, for René had gone in the company of Monseigneur himself, so what surer guarantee could his sister and mother have of his well-being and safety?

CHAPTER XLIII

MARTIN SAINT-DENYS, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune in the peerage of the United Kingdom, landed at Margate from the packet-boat *Queen of Ireland* on the twenty-third day of April, 1802. He had been absent from England less than a month. "A lifetime," he calls it in his Memoirs. He arrived at his house in Berkeley Square the same evening, having posted from Margate. The whole of the next morning he spent in the capable hands of Mr. Bunch, who helped him, as he said afterwards, to return to civilisation.

In the early part of the afternoon he sallied forth to go to Lincoln's Inn Fields, there to call upon Mr. Podmore, the long-suffering family lawyer, who before now had done his best to stem the torrent of his lordship's extravagance.

Mr. Podmore put aside every other business and got rid as quickly as he could of every other client, for it was not often that his lordship honoured the musty old office with his presence.

"I understand your lordship has been abroad," he said, as soon as he had exchanged greetings with his client and his lordship had taken a seat beside the heavily littered desk.

"Quite right, my dear Podmore," his lordship said, "I have been on a short visit to France."

"A distressful country just now, my lord."

"In some ways, yes."

"A glass of wine, my lord? Or . . . ?"

"No, thanks. I have come to talk business, my friend."

"Business? Heavens above! You, my lord?"

"Yes, I! No wonder you are flabbergasted."

"Not flabbergasted," the lawyer protested. "Highly, very highly delighted."

"Why delighted?"

"Because this mean that your lordship must have seen . . ."

"It means nothing more or less, my friend, than that I desire to purchase some property in France, and that I wish to know how much spare cash I can have for this purpose."

"Property in France?" Mr. Podmore ejaculated, for he was a true Briton and disapproved of any financial transaction outside the jurisdiction of the British Empire.

"Oh, do not get alarmed. I am not proposing to buy an ancestral château and thousands of acres of land. I want to buy a cottage somewhere in Normandy which should not cost more than forty pounds. Only, having a house, I should wish to live in

it. My wants would be few, and a couple of quid a week would be ample for my purpose. The question is, have I got forty pounds in cash left and could I afford to spend a couple of quid a week, say, for the next twenty years?"

Poor Mr. Podmore's eyes had opened wider and wider as his lordship propounded his amazing scheme. Indeed, the fear was slowly taking root in his mind that Martin, the only son of that distinguished diplomat, Roy Baron Saint-Denys and Brune, who had negotiated the treaty of Cuerta with the Portuguese and incidentally been friend and client to Mr. Podmore and his father before him, was on the point of losing his reason owing, no doubt, to his life of dissipation or perhaps to hardships suffered during the recent campaign. He had thought from the first that his lordship looked both thinner and older.

Saint-Denys caught the look of bewilderment in the lawyer's face and burst out laughing.

"I am not mad, you know, Podmore," he said. "I am perfectly sane and never felt better in my life."

"But in that case, my lord——"

"What?"

"As I have often told your lordship, all that we want is a meeting with your creditors."

"But I don't want to meet my creditors. I loathe the sight of them. I've told you that often enough."

"But, my lord . . ."

"There's no 'but' about it, Podmore. I won't sit opposite a crowd of ugly faces. They would make me sick."

"If you would only listen . . ."

"And I won't listen to interminable talk about the money I had and the money I spent. I know I have no money and that I owe more than I ever had, so that's that."

"Quite so, but on the other hand——"

"And if you say any more about it, Podmore, I'll go to some pettifogging attorney next door and put my affairs, such as they are, in his hands."

Had it been possible for a lawyer of Mr. Podmore's standing to swear he certainly would have done it now. As it was, he allowed himself the relief of an impatient sigh and an unusually curt, "Very good, my lord." Whereupon his lordship once more reverted to the question of purchasing a cottage in Normandy, together with a quarter of an acre of land, and Mr. Podmore was able to assure him that the necessary purchase price would be at his disposal whenever he wished, and an annuity of a hundred

pounds a year guaranteed to him by the trustees of the settled estate. He was seriously hurt and upset by what he termed his lordship's want of balance, and were it not for the affection he bore the son of his old friend and the respect he had for the bearer of one of the most honoured names in England, he would have given vent to his displeasure in forcible language. It was impossible to talk sense with this scatterbrain, and Mr. Podmore very nearly said so. He had it in his mind, however, that as soon as his lordship had gone he would indite a letter to him setting forth the plain and simple fact that by meeting his creditors and making an arrangement between them and his trustees, and also by adhering for a certain number of years to rigid rules of economy, the vast Saint-Denys and Brune estates could be freed from mortgage within a very short time. All this could perhaps best be explained in a letter, and no one but a born fool, which his lordship certainly was not, could fail to take his dispositions accordingly.

Indeed Mr. Podmore, having made up his mind to the writing of this letter, took a cheerful, though still dignified, leave of his client. But his lordship apparently divined his thoughts, for just as Mr. Podmore was bowing him out of the office he turned and said with a laugh :

"And you know, my friend, that if you send me one of your interminable letters it'll go straightway into the waste-paper basket unread."

What was an honest and well-meaning lawyer to do in face of such unpardonable levity?

CHAPTER XLIV

LORD SAINT-DENYS duly sent his cheque for five thousand pounds to the order of Monseigneur le Duc de Berry, with a covering letter to say that a certain Monsieur Legros, who was probably known to his Royal Highness, and to whom he, Saint-Denys, was indebted for the sum, had requested him to remit it to Monseigneur, which he now did and also hoped that Monseigneur had made a good journey in the company of Monsieur le Vicomte de Marillac.

The letter was duly posted to Hartwell, and the next day Saint-Denys betook himself to a small house on the slope of the Sussex Downs, where lived a very old lady who had been his mother's

maid and who had been present at his birth. The house had been left to her in the former Lord Saint-Denys's will, and whenever Martin felt peculiarly bored or out of tune with the London season, he would drive down to Clare Cottage and rusticate in the company of Miss Wood, until the country bored him in its turn, and he would return to London or Brighton or Scotland, or whatever place claimed him for the time being. During the war he had more than once spent part of his leave with the old dame, and now, when he longed for quietude and peace in order that his mind might dwell uninterruptedly on Félise, he took horse and, accompanied by his faithful Bunch, betook himself to Clare Cottage and the soothing influence of Miss Wood.

The contrast between the smooth English Downs and the woodland heights of La Villorée, between the dullish Sussex yokels and the ruffianly Chouans, was so great that his whole adventure soon appeared only as a dream: Cottereau—the old tower—the château—old Matthieu—the *Cabaret du Pélican*—the well—the underground conduit: none of these could possibly be real. He, Martin, had dreamt them all. They were the creations of his dreams. The only reality was Félise—Félise of the blue eyes, deep as the midnight sky in June: Félise of the exquisite pale hands like the petals of a magnolia: Félise! always Félise!

Hating the very thought of London and the gaieties of Easter-tide he lingered on at Clare Cottage for more than a fortnight. Once or twice he bethought himself of Mr. Podmore and the charge he had given him to provide him with forty pounds wherewith to purchase a cottage in Normandy. He had one in his mind which he had perceived on the morning of his departure, just the other side of Tilly, near enough that from time to time and unbeknown to her he could catch a glimpse of the woman who was all the world to him. Near enough, too, to be of service to her at a moment's notice should she require his aid or protection. Cottereau had taken himself out of this world, but the guerrilla warfare was by no means at an end, and Félise with her independence and her pride might arouse the enmity of Cottereau's successor or the vindictiveness of his men.

It was on the fifteenth day of his stay at Clare Cottage that a courier, sent by the caretaker of the house in Berkeley Square, came with the news that His Majesty the King of France had sent a special messenger to my lord Saint-Denys, urgently requesting the pleasure of his company at a friendly reception to intimates to be given at Hartwell on the twentieth day of May at five o'clock in the afternoon. No English gentleman, however bored or how-

ever much in love he might be, could ignore so gracious an invitation. Saint-Denys immediately posted for London, and on the appointed day duly presented himself at the beautiful English country house which harboured the last scions of the Royal house of Bourbon.

Except for the size of the house and the actual number of flunkeys, attendants and gentlemen, Martin felt that he might have been in Versailles. The ceremonial, though restricted to a certain extent, was every bit as rigid and as elaborate as it had been in the days of the Grand Monarque. Lord Saint-Denys, mounting the principal staircase, had his name passed on from one liveried flunkey to another, until he found himself before the wide open double doors of the principal reception-room, whilst a stentorian voice called out in the time-honoured style: "Lord Saint-Denys and Brune."

Assuredly the parquet floor was highly polished, but few men were better acquainted with parquet floors than his lordship, who had led the cotillon in some of the finest ballrooms in London and Paris, and demonstrated the graces of the new Viennese waltz before the most critical array of bright eyes. It was therefore not the slippery floor that caused him to lose his balance. Almost, but not quite. He certainly staggered, and passed his hand across his eyes, for an unaccountable dizziness seized him even as he entered the room, and his eyes rested on the radiant vision of beauty which had haunted his dreams all these past days and nights. *Félice!* He saw nothing else . . . no one . . . only *Félice*, and he did not see her very clearly, for there was a mist before his eyes. She was standing quite still at the farther end of the room. Her golden hair was dressed in elaborate little curls, and her poise was more demure, more precise than in those dream days at *La Villorée*. But she was still *Félice!* And her blue eyes—those wonderful eyes of hers—looked straight across the room to him.

Someone advanced to meet him as he came farther into the room. It was René de Marillac.

"My lord Saint-Denys," he said, "it is I who will have the honour of presenting you to His Majesty."

Martin was obliged then to look round. Following René's lead, however, he only saw fat Monsieur Legros, with the big paunch and the thin legs, sitting in a stiff *fauteuil* with a very straight back and with his masterful white hands resting on the arms of the chair. He glanced about him somewhat helplessly and distinctly bewildered. He saw the Duc de Berry and the Comte d'Artois; he saw Madame la Marquise standing beside her

daughter; he saw Félise again and didn't want to see anything else after that, until René de Marillac said solemnly :

"The King of France, my lord !"

And then Monsieur Legros gave a little laugh and said :

"You do not recognise an old friend, my lord Saint-Denys?"

CHAPTER XLV

It was the day after that memorable afternoon at Hartwell, that the musty old office in Lincoln's Inn Fields was visited by a whirlwind. Figuratively speaking, of course. The whirlwind was just the person of Martin Saint-Denys, Baron Saint-Denys and Brune, who was ready to meet his creditors whom he loathed, to look on a row of ugly faces which made him sick, to agree to any and every arrangement which that worthy, Mr. Podmore, could and would make so that he, Martin, had a sufficient income to keep the most exquisite wife man ever had in as great a luxury as his ruined fortunes could command. With an income of fifty thousand pounds a year from the entailed estates, an arrangement was presently come to which satisfied the demands of Monsieur le Marquis and Madame la Marquise de Marillac de la Villorée for the maintenance of their daughter in accordance with her rank, until such time as she could share with her husband the full revenues impounded by the creditors.

In the final chapter of Lord Saint-Denys's "Indiscretions" he gives a very succinct account of all the legal formalities which this arrangement necessitated.

"It was all terribly long and terribly boring, and were it not for the insistence of His Majesty the King of France, I doubt if the Marquis de Marillac would have been so amenable. But by the end of June everything was settled and . . ."

Here follow a multiplicity of asterisks, and it would not be possible to gather what happened after the end of June if we had no other record of the events save the "Indiscretions."

One thing, however, follows the profusion of asterisks, and that is the brief mention of a charming wedding present, a quaint old ring—a turquoise matrix engraved with the arms of the Bourbons. It was sent to the bridegroom with the words :

"From your grateful friend, Louis Legros."

